

# DANTE STUDIES

with the Annual Report  
of the Dante Society



CXXIII

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2005

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RICHARD LANSING

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## Editor's Foreword

In assuming the editorship of the oldest literary journal published in the United States, I am mindful of the longstanding tradition of excellence that sustains the reputation of *Dante Studies*, and which is the mark left by those before me who have edited its pages with so much care and caring. Harry Levin, the dean of comparative literature for the greater part of the twentieth century, opened his prize winning sophomore essay at Harvard College with the words "Archeology is a sentimental science." The editing of a journal, we might add, is also a sentimental science, not because it concerns the study of archaic objects, but because it subsists only by virtue of a spirit of love and devotion passed on from one generation to another. I wish to express my gratitude to Steven Botterill, whose editorship I succeed, and to Christopher Kleinhenz who preceded him, for having taught me what I know about this sentimental science, and even more for their long friendship and the many hours spent talking of Dante and his writings. It is a pleasure that I hope will be rewarded by the renewal of many years to come.

The present volume owes as much to my predecessor's efforts as to mine. While it must seem to you who now read these words that this volume has been a "long time coming," such appearances should not be taken as an index of future promise. The volumes for 2006, 2007, and 2008, were all conceived during Steven Botterill's tenure with the approbation of the Council of the Society. Each volume is devoted to a special topic and has a guest editor. Wayne Storey and Michelangelo Zaccarello have edited a collection of papers from the May 2006 conference held in Pontremoli and Mulazzo, Italy, on "Dante in the Lunigiana." Arielle Saiber, who teaches at Bowdoin College where the Society's first president, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, first taught, has put together an issue

to honor the 200th anniversary of the American poet's birth. The volume for the year 2008, devoted to the topic "Dante and Islam" and under the supervision of Jan Ziolkowski, will be in press, as will the others, by the time the present issue has been published. While fortune always holds the last card, it is entirely reasonable to think that *Dante Studies* will have been brought entirely up to date by the end of 2008. Still, wary of Guido's adage "lunga promessa con l'attender corto," I will make no promises. But our hopes are high.

In closing, I would like to appeal to all readers, both members of the Society as well as those of the wider public, to submit, and to ask others to consider submitting, essays on Dante for the coming years. In this regard, I would like to call attention to two changes. First, you will find among the last pages of this issue a Style Sheet for preparation of manuscripts. The lack of such a guide for contributors in the past has made their work and ours more tedious than was necessary. This guide will undergo changes with successive issues until it reaches its ideal form. Second, the Board of Editors will read and evaluate all submissions and reach a decision to accept, revise, or reject, within the space of ONE MONTH. Submissions will no longer have to be timed to reach our offices at the critical junctures of our May and October Board meetings. With the possible exception of illustrations and unforeseen circumstances, all submissions must be made via email attachment, in any version of Word, now the industry standard. Finally, in the coming months Giuseppe Mazzotta, the President of the Society, will appoint new members to the Board of Editors. Though his name only appears at the very end of my foreword, he has been and remains first in my mind as I begin my editorship. I thank him for his confidence in my competence to carry out the journal's mandate, and I thank him especially for his unswerving dedication to the continued welfare of the Society, and for his enduring friendship.

Richard Lansing  
*Waltham, Massachusetts*  
*June, 2008*

# Cosmology and the Kiss of Creation

## (*Paradiso* 27–29)

GIUSEPPE MAZZOTTA

**I**n the Primum Mobile, which is the ninth sphere of *Paradiso*, Dante confronts two fundamental issues in the structure and significance of the *Divine Comedy*: creation and cosmology. I intend to explore here the links joining together these two pillars of Dante's poetic edifice. I will highlight the subtle and yet substantial differences that exist between them and I will show how these differences stem from their respective fields of study: theology and science. Nonetheless, I will also argue that Dante posits and probes their compatibility and even their interdependence.<sup>1</sup>

The two questions of cosmology and creation, treated in these cantos, are linked first of all by their common root in Metaphysics, a discipline which Dante associates with the Primum Mobile. What we are to understand by Metaphysics emerges from the opening words of *Convivio*, which allude explicitly to Aristotle's *Metaphysics* or "First Philosophy": "Sì come dice lo Filosofo nel principio de la Prima Filosofia, tutti li uomini naturalmente desiderano di sapere" (1.1) (As the Philosopher says at the beginning of the *First Philosophy*, all men by nature desire to know.) "First Philosophy"—also known as "scientia naturalis," "scientia divina" and natural theology—means wisdom ordering the arts and sciences toward the perfection of Man. Etymologically it yokes together the love of wisdom and the wisdom of love. It is called "first" because it rules supreme among the sciences, probes origins, principles, foundations, and causes (including the origins of philosophy itself) and reveals that everybody, women and men, by their very nature desire to know or, as Dante says, "sapere," a verb that in the lexicon of *Convivio*'s banqueting evokes the taste of wisdom and the physicality of an intellectual nourishment.

Also in *Convivio*, Dante connects the Primum Mobile with ethics and assigns Metaphysics to the eighth sphere or Heaven of the Fixed Stars. In the economy of this philosophical treatise, in which the arts are viewed within an earthbound horizon, from the perspective of their usefulness to the good life, ethics is exalted as the very finality of philosophical knowledge. This particular hierarchical arrangement of the arts and sciences is abandoned in the *Divine Comedy*. In cantos 27–29 of *Paradiso*, the primacy belongs to Metaphysics, which however, as the opening sentence of *Convivio* shows, can never be altogether separated from ethics.

The description of the ambit of Metaphysics is found in *Convivio* (2.14), where in the wake of Aristotle's model of the sciences, the proximity and complementariness between Physics and Metaphysics are explored. It is as if each of these two disciplines depended on the other, and each offers a particular perspective implicating the other:

Dico che lo Cielo stellato si puote comparare a la Fisica per tre proprietadi, e a la Metafisica per altre tre: ch'ello ci mostra di sé due visibili cose . . .

[Lo cielo stellato] . . . ha esso grandissima similitudine con la Fisica . . . lo movimento locale . . . lo movimento di alterazione . . . e lo movimento del crescere . . .

. . . la Metafisica tratti de le prime sustanzie, le quali noi non potemo simigliantemente intendere se non per li loro effetti . . .

. . . per lo polo che vedemo significa le cose sensibili, de le quali, universalmente pigliandole, tratta la Fisica; e per lo polo che non vedemo significa le cose che sono senza materia, che non sono sensibili, de le quali tratta la Metafisica . . . Ché per lo movimento ne lo quale ogni die si rivolge, e fa nova circolazione di punto a punto, significa le cose naturali corruttibili, che cotidianamente compiono loro via, e la loro materia si muta di forma in forma; e di queste tratta la Fisica. E per lo movimento quasi insensibile, che fa da occidente in oriente per uno grado in cento anni, significa le cose incorruttibili, le quali ebbero da Dio cominciamento di creazione e non averanno fine: e di queste tratta la Metafisica.

(*Conv.* 2.14.1–4, 8–11)

The passage compares the two disciplines and defines them as two different and yet complementary and interrelated fields of study. Physics orders the phenomena of the natural world and treats questions of place, time, motion, and things that change, grow, and perish. It explores the life of the cosmos within the compass of its finiteness. Metaphysics, instead, leads us back to the causes behind the natural happenings, it looks for their origins, and it projects a light within which phenomena are considered in the totality of their relations of identity and difference. In this

sense, Metaphysics appears as the branch of knowledge that comes after (*meta*) Physics, but not in the sense of its cataloging on the library shelves.

These two dimensions of physical and metaphysical knowledge are dramatized in the *Primum Mobile*, which is defined as the heaven or basis from which all things stem, move, and manifest themselves.<sup>2</sup> The *Primum Mobile* can be defined as the place of time; it produces time and space; orders the revolutions of the heavens and their influences, concealments, and showing forth; and it introduces eternal things: “. . . se possibile fosse questo nono cielo non muovere, la terza parte del cielo sarebbe ancora non veduta in ciascuno luogo de la terra; . . . non sarebbe né die, né settimana, né mese né anno, ma tutto l’universo sarebbe disordinato” (*Conv.* 2.14.16–17).

The *Primum Mobile* mobilizes, so to speak, thinking and shows thought’s power and limits. It sets up relations between disciplines placed in areas distant from each other: creation, the event inaugurating the onset of the universe; and cosmology, the science studying the physical structure of the universe, come forth as two branches rooted in the folds of Metaphysics. These insights, articulated in *Convivio*, reappear in *Paradiso* 27–29 and shape their conceptual unfolding. Dante treats and mixes together physical and metaphysical issues, such as time, motion, creation, separate substances, space, and truth.

“When we do perceive a ‘before’ and an ‘after,’” writes Aristotle in his *Physics*, “then we say that there is time. For time is just this: a number of motion in respect to ‘before’ and ‘after’” (219a22—b2). This statement from the *Physics* appears practically literally translated in *Convivio* (4.2.6) to gloss the philosophical sense of time in Dante’s own doctrinal song. Beatrice figures time not as a straight line or as Plato’s circle, the Wheel of Becoming, containing all things within itself, but as a tree stemming from the pot of eternity, the “testo” (*Par.* 27.118) (flower-pot) from which time grows and stems out into several dimensions. On earth, in the shadow of time, we see its fallen leaves. The reference to the roots of time is countered by the complementary question of space. St. Peter’s invective against the historical place of the Church (*Par.* 27.22–23) gives way to the spiritual place of the *Primum Mobile*, to the “re-placement” both of the angelic hierarchy and the arts and sciences, as well as to the definition of the physical and metaphysical “points” of the cosmos.<sup>3</sup> Issues such as the origin of the cosmos, the creation of the heavens, angels, and brute matter,



speculation on beginnings (“esordi,” “principio,” “cominciamenti,” etc.) thread the fabric of these cantos.

To unravel these thematic knots in the Primum Mobile, I would like to focus on the weave of two images drawn from *Inferno*. In *Paradiso* 27, at the boundaries of the physical universe, Beatrice directs the pilgrim’s gaze onto the vast spaces they have just crossed: “. . . ‘Adima / il viso e guarda come tu se’ vòlto’” (*Par.* 27.77–78). In the distance, his eyes recognize a particular place, the way taken by Ulysses in his adventure toward unknown worlds, the “varco folle d’Ulisse” (81–82).

“Varco”—from “varicare”—literally means an opening, a breach, and a going beyond. It denotes both the laying out of a path or a sea-lane receiving Ulysses and, by virtue of the adjective “folle,” the openness or straying of his mind in taking it. In this sense, the phrase describes a wandering beyond all limits (including the limits of reason) and a passage into the open sea by a hero who abandoned (and perhaps did not know) his place in the world and lost his way. In recalling the tragic grandeur of the Greek hero, Dante both takes his distance from and draws nearer to him. The pilgrim’s broad scenario and path of thinking contrast with the narrowness of Ulysses’ quest. But more is at stake than a mere juxtaposition between them.

The first image introduces us to the pilgrim’s Odyssean version of intellectual / imaginative risk. He enters the Primum Mobile. This heaven—as Beatrice goes on to explain—occupies a unique position: it lies within physical space and, at the same time, it is surrounded and contained by the spiritual world of light and love, the Empyrean, which transcends the physical dimensions of time and space: “e questo cielo non ha altro dove / che la mente divina” (*Par.* 27.109–110). The ambivalent status of the Primum Mobile is conveyed by the word “meta” (*Par.* 27.108), which describes the origin of the universe’s motion and which carries the two opposed meanings, as in a circle, of beginning and end. Like Ulysses at the Pillars of Hercules, when he breaks open the closed perimeter of Ptolemaic geography, Dante stands at the boundary of physical space and moves beyond: he enters metaphysics and journeys into the mind of God. His adventure, which comes through as a variant of Saint Bonaventure’s *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, opens up a new horizon on the shape of the cosmos, and this opening up will demand a new orientation of thought.

The second image from Hell occurs in the simile at the exordium of *Paradiso* 29 and it concerns the figure of Francesca. Let me put the scene in context. Beatrice has been explaining the “gerarcia” (*Par.* 28.121), a word that the Pseudo-Dionysius etymologizes as the sacred order of the angelic ranks. Her triads of angels follow the rank ordering of the Aeropagite’s *Celestial Hierarchy* (6–9.130) and revise both the account provided by Gregory the Great (113) in his *Moralia in Job* (32.23.41–43) as well as Dante’s own version of the “place” assigned to the order of Thrones in *Convivio* (2.5.6). As Scotus Eriugena puts it in his *Commentary to Celestial Hierarchy* (PL 122, 1050), the Thrones preside over the Heaven where God sits in judgment on his creation.

As soon as Beatrice finishes her disquisition on angelology—almost without a break, but not quite—she expounds the doctrine of creation. The apparent continuity between the two different phases of her discourse is introduced by an astronomical simile:

Quando ambedue li figli di Latona,  
coperti del Montone e de la Libra,  
fanno de l’orizzonte insieme zona,  
quant’ è dal punto che ’l cenit inlibra  
infin che l’uno e l’altro da quel cinto,  
cambiando l’emisperio si dilibra,  
tanto, col volto di riso dipinto,  
si tacque B  atrice, riguardando  
fiso nel punto che m’av  a vinto.  
Poi cominci  : “Io dico, e non dimando,  
quel che tu vuoi udir, perch’ io l’ho visto  
l   ’ve s’appunta ogne *ubi* e ogne *quando*.  
Non per aver a s   di bene acquisto,  
ch’esser non pu  , ma perch   suo splendore  
potesse, risplendendo, dir “‘*Subsisto*,’”  
in sua eternit   di tempo fore,  
fuor d’ogne altro comprender, come i piacque,  
s’aperse in nuovi amor l’eterno amore.”

(*Par.* 29.1–18)

The physical image of the arrangement of the sun and the moon, the two brotherly planets, along the line of the horizon, where they are joined together and balanced by the zenith, provides the background to Dante’s metaphysics of creation.<sup>4</sup> Creation is understood as an act of God’s pleasure and freedom, and on this freedom every other possible freedom and

every possible origin (for origin and freedom are always interconnected) are founded. Time and space (“ubi et quando”) coincide in it, and through it eternity opens up—“si apre”—to time and to being.

Mythological and scientific lexicons (“children of Latona,” “horizon,” “zenith,” “hemisphere”) are balanced with each other, and this equilibrium is poetically rendered by the chiasmus joining together the first twelve lines of the canto’s exordium. The initial word “Quando” reappears as the last word of line 12, “quando”; the first syllable of “Latona” appears as “là,” the adverb of place introducing line 12. The two arms of the chiasmus (X) intersect at the word “emisferio,” a term which in astronomy designates the two halves of the celestial sphere. The artifice of the chiasmus, however, traces not only the centripetal convergence of elements distant from each other: it figures at the same time their centrifugal divergence, their point of flight.

The text places us, then, at a crossroads in the cosmic space, there where the disjunctions of time are perceived as an uninterrupted spatial sequence. By focusing on the almost imperceptible, yet real break in the flow of Beatrice’s speech, Dante conveys the essential questions of creation, and the question turns out to be crucial, even to the way we understand the existence of the world in physical terms. In effect, he questions the possibility of localizing a beginning, of pin-pointing a break between a before and an after, in the apparently seamless flow of Beatrice’s speech.<sup>5</sup> To signal the elusive instant of time connecting and dividing her two theories on angels and creation, which is as short as the breath dividing the syllables of a word, Dante describes Beatrice as she gazes at the same point that had overwhelmed his sight. The description’s language echoes the moment separating Francesca’s reading of her love-book, *Lancelot*, and the kiss she exchanges with her lover. The phrase “punto che m’avea vinto” bears a distant and yet recognizable echo of “ma solo un punto fu quel che ci vinse” (*Inf.* 5.32).

Why does Dante frame his reflections on cosmology and creation by recalling two infernal figures living in worlds historically and morally distant from each other? The two figures are joined by a self-evident complementariness: one’s desire to know counters the other’s knowledge of desire. Ulysses thinks he lives in space; Francesca thinks she lives in time. Ulysses, the hero who abandons his birthplace, stops at Gaeta and lists the cities he touches (Seville, Ceuta), and crystallizes his permanent displacement, his not belonging to a determined place. Francesca, instead, evokes

the places of her land, but she moves mainly within the dimensions of time, whose flow she wishes to stop and whose future to erase.

The pilgrim reminds her of the “. . . tempo d'i dolci sospiri” (*Inf.* 5.118); Francesca indulges, painfully, in remembering her “tempo felice” (122) and scans her love-story within the arc of those days—“Noi leggiammo un giorno” (127)—and circles to “quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante” (138). Ulysses flies on the wings of the intellect: “de' remi,” he says, “facemmo ali al folle volo” (*Inf.* 26.125); Francesca, in turn, flies, like a dove, on wings of desire.<sup>6</sup> Ulysses is a cartographer/philosopher, who follows the movements of the sun, gazes into the night—which is the dark part of knowledge coinciding with the unknowability of his fate and his death—and reads the stars to map new and unknown geographic spaces. Francesca, by contrast, embodies the carnality of knowledge, and she understands knowledge in a biblical sense. One is drawn to what he does not know, pursues “virtute e canoscenza” (*Inf.* 26.120), the ethically good life, the morality of an absolute knowledge, and flounders. The other, with her metaphysics of desire, claims to know the origins, the “prima radice” (*Inf.* 5.124) of her love passion, as if her passion were the flower of love.

In effect, Ulysses and Francesca come through as two failed metaphysicians, who are caught by misunderstanding and deceptions constitutive of their thoughts and actions. In his metaphysical journey, Dante will go beyond the paths traced by the fictions of his two characters. He will travel beyond death, to the point where space and time meet, where the good turns into the true, and desire into knowledge. Yet their presence (explicit in the case of Ulysses, oblique and almost cancelled in the case of Francesca) opens the space for some radical innovations on cosmology and creation.

The cosmos Dante envisions from the height of the Primum Mobile marks a radical departure from the Ptolemaic diagram of space. Looking within the Empyrean, which the Letter to Can Grande (*Epistle* 13) etymologizes as the heaven glowing with the fire of holy love (Paragraph 24) and is the Heaven of Theology, a new universe appears to him, parallel and adjacent to the planetary system of the physical universe with the earth at its center. This other universe, with God at its center, contains a sequence of concentric circles ruled by the hierarchy of the nine orders of angels. Like Aristotle's unmoved movers, they turn the spheres. And as in Aristotle's cosmological model, the concentric spheres share the same

center. Seen from the boundary of the Primum Mobile, which acts as the equator containing and dividing the spheres' parallels, the rings become progressively smaller and smaller, and they acquire more speed the closer they stand to the divine center. The two distinct and adjacent universes, like two sequences of concentric coils or two hemispheres, do not overlap, nor is one the projection of the other. Together they constitute the whole universe and they touch in the Primum Mobile, where infinity embraces finite space.

Medieval cosmology, as one learns from the *Image du Monde*—which re-elaborates the speculations of the Venerable Bede (*De natura rerum*), Honorius of Autun (his encyclopedic *De imagine mundi*) and William of Conches—represents the cosmos, in the mode of the Neo-platonic model, with two tiers: the Crystalline and the Empyrean. Honorius even mentions nine hierarchies inhabiting the spiritual heaven (*PL* 172, col. 146). Dante's imaginative resolution shows him radically altering the terms of the tradition. By virtue of his theology—which yokes together the conceptions of God both containing and transcending His creation—he elaborates a view of infinity that both contains and is contained by the finite universe. The paradox finds its sense in the light of the mystical definition of God as the infinite sphere whose center is everywhere but whose circumference is nowhere.<sup>7</sup>

A first detail for grasping the image of Dante's cosmos appears in *Paradiso* 28. Dante and Beatrice enter the Primum Mobile and he stresses the uniformity of this sphere:

Le parti sue vivissime ed eccelse  
sì uniforme son, ch'i' non so dire  
qual Bèatrice per loco mi scelse.  
(*Par.* 27. 100–102)

The description obliterates the sense of objective distance, between what appears close and far, and in this equivalence of contrary terms lies the uniformity of the sphere. The uniformity of the Primum Mobile suggests that the Empyrean is not placed only vertically on top of the physical cosmos, in a particular place. It means also that the Empyrean uniformly surrounds the boundaries of the physical world. To make clear the meaning to be attributed to the uniformity of the Primum Mobile, Beatrice insists both on the role it plays in the economy of the cosmos and on the place it occupies:

“La natura del mondo, che quïeta  
il mezzo e tutto l'altro intorno move,  
quinci comincia come da sua meta;  
e questo cielo non ha altro dove  
che la mente divina, in che s'accende  
l'amor che 'l volge e la virtù ch'ei piove.  
Luce e amor d'un cerchio lui comprende,  
sì come questo li altri; e quel precinto  
colui che 'l cinge solamente intende.  
Non è suo moto per altro distinto,  
ma li altri son mensurati da questo,  
sì come diece da mezzo e da quinto;  
e come il tempo tegna in cotal testo  
le sue radici e ne li altri le fronde,  
omai a te può esser manifesto.”

(*Par.* 27.106–120)

The lines recapitulate traditional cosmological elements. The center of the universe is unmoved and everything revolves around it. The circle of light and love encloses and hugs the *Primum Mobile*. In such topography, the *Primum Mobile*—the boundary of the physical cosmos—marks both a limit and a threshold: it bounds the physical universe and opens to the spiritual universe where the choirs of angels dwell. By stressing its uniformity, Dante brings to light at least four implications of physical space. The first implication is that every point is both center and circumference, and they coincide. Second, the shape of a sphere implies the curvature of space. Such a figuration of the curved space dismisses as a fiction the idea of the edge of space beyond which lies the void. Third, in a spherical space, the curvature implies that the pilgrim's journey to God is a return to God. Fourth, the universe has a finite but unlimited, unbounded structure.<sup>8</sup>

Such an insight, at once theological and poetic, into the curved spherical space, triggers a new way of thinking. At the boundary of this visible sphere, rather than a closure, a new universe coming into view radiates from a point of blinding light without extension. The pilgrim's eyes see it in the distance, neither larger nor more visible than a minute grain of sand, and from this infinitely small point—which is contained within the celestial rings and, paradoxically, contains all creation—heaven and all nature are dependent:

E com' io mi rivolsi e furon tocchi  
li miei de ciò che pare in quel volume,

quandunque nel suo giro ben s'adocchi,  
un punto vidi che raggiava lume  
acuto sì, che 'l viso ch'elli affoca  
chiuder conviensi per lo forte acume;  
e quale stella par quinci più poca,  
parrebbe luna, locata con esso  
come stella con stella si collòca.

(*Par.* 28.13–21)

The terminology employed to describe the physical space (“volume,” “giro,” “punto,” “locato,” “si colloca”) recalls the premises of the *Physics*. This language defies any facile exegesis. Scholars, who have wrestled with the difficulties of the passage, confess its obscurity as if Dante’s thought became here incomprehensible: what is the precise sense to attach to the line “quandunque nel suo giro ben s’adocchi”? Why is it given in the present tense? Does it mean that God and his angels always dwell in the Primum Mobile? And in what way can it be said that the infinite sphere is contained in the finite universe?<sup>9</sup>

To unravel these obscurely-worded lines and explain Dante’s cosmological design, we ought to keep in mind that Dante goes beyond contemporary physical theories and that at this point he leaves behind the modality of perception appropriate to the space of Euclidean geometry. The image of the Wheel of Fortune—on which we stand in the sublunary world and because of which the entities of this world flow, vanish, ascend, and descend—represents human perspective in the permanent curvature of space. From the classical, Aristotelian idea of spherical space, thus, Dante derives the logical consequences of the curvature of space. Because the sphere of the universe curves on itself, the Empyrean is uniformly visible from any point whatsoever in the Primum Mobile—“quandunque . . . ben s’adocchi”—if we only know how to look, as the pilgrim, by God’s grace, did.<sup>10</sup>

The spiritual universe is organized around a “punto,” a term which *Convivio* (2.13.26), citing Euclid’s *Elements*, explains as a “geometric principle.” The understanding of “punto” as a center resonates with the endless debates carried out by atomists, Scholastics, and logicians of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (such as Nicholas of Autrecourt, St. Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, Durandus de Sancto Porciano, and William of Ockham.) If some of them, following the perspective of geometry, deny that a point has any “positive and indivisible reality,” others assign

to geometry's "point" an abstract, purely mental existence.<sup>11</sup> By contrast, Dante manages to connect physics and Metaphysics, the finite and the infinite, by making the "punto" both the minimal, indivisible and the incommensurable figure of an infinite God.

Further, "giro" and "volume" depict respectively the circular shape of space and the movement of the sphere, whose only boundary is the metaphysical "solo amore e luce ha per confine" (*Par.* 28.54) (only love and light for its confine). As is known, Dante employs the word "volume"—etymologically from *volvere*, to turn—not only for the rotatory motion of the heavens and the revolution of the sphere. It is also used metaphorically throughout the poem in other parallel senses. At the beginning and the end of the *Divine Comedy*, it describes the *Aeneid* and the book of the universe with its leaves scattered all over creation. The first occurrence—"vagliami 'l lungo studio e 'l grande amore / che m'ha fatto cercar lo tuo volume" (*Inf.* 1.83–84)—prefigures the image of God's book at the end: "legato con amore in un volume, / ciò che per l'universo si squaderna" (*Par.* 33.86–87). These two senses—scientific and rhetorical—however divergent they appear to be, implicate each other, and through them Dante connects cosmology and creation.

Dante clearly distinguishes between "libro" and "volume" and the distinction concerns the materiality of their respective production. The book, such as the one read, for instance, by Francesca, is obtained from within the bark of a tree (hence *folium*). "Volume," by contrast, designates a manuscript in the cylindrical form of an unrolling scroll or parchment, wrapped around a small wooden stick and held together by a ring. But Dante does not merely figure the universe as a scroll or a parchment. The double image of the "binding" ("legato con amore") and of the scattering of substances and accidents ("ciò che per l'universo si squaderna"), as if they were leaves, recalls the model of the codex, which is made of *quaterni* (fascicles of four folios). Historically, the codex came into being between the second and the fourth century AD. It was formed by *quaterniones* of papyrus leaves and it displaced after centuries of coexistence the more ancient, classical parchment scroll. Traditionally, it was marked by an *incipit* at the beginning and by an *explicit* at the end. In effect, the codex has a linear structure and it contains glosses and annotations.<sup>12</sup>

In the light of this language from the history of manuscripts, it can be inferred that Dante figures the cosmos as the paradoxical simultaneous



combination of scroll and *codex*, of a circle and a square, which the geometer—as he will say in one of his last tercets—in vain seeks to trace (“Qual è ’l geometra che tutto s’affige / per misurar lo cerchio, e non ritrova, / pensando, quel principio ond’ elli indige”) (*Par.* 33.133–135). Furthermore, taken in its textual dimension, the term “volume” designates an allegorical structure hiding in its folds unknown messages and complications, to which the reader gains access through hermeneutical procedures opening up, uncovering, and explicating the inner significance. “Volume,” then, casts the constitution of the world as a vast, polysemic allegory. Thus, the hybrid model of allegorical complications, of the scroll and of the *codex*, represents the poetry of the universe. Such poetry rests on the cosmological role of the incarnate Word.

The *cosmobook* written by the finger of God gives itself as a weave of unknown and secret parts and of visible signs, of polysemies and quadruple level of sense (literal, allegorical, tropological, and anagogical). These levels of exegesis both correspond to and announce the four dimensions of space. The three-dimensional Euclidean geometry proves inadequate to describing cosmic space. The *Divine Comedy*, which is a cosmological epic, can legitimately be called the poetic model of the cosmos as much as it gives the specular image of the cosmos. It contains and mirrors the design of Creation while being part of Creation. In this way, it leads the soul of the reader to the discovery of divine wisdom. Like the cosmos, Dante’s poem has dimensions which are both finite and unbounded. And both, in so far as they yoke together science, theology, and poetry, preserve the perspective of creation and of the Divine Author, who can be known through the esthetics of creation.

Accordingly, the architecture of the spiritual sphere is shaped by the esthetic theology articulated by the Pseudo-Dionysius’ angelology. The Greeks, as Isidore of Seville puts it in his *Etymologies* (13.1), borrowed the name of the cosmos from ‘ornament,’ on account of the variety of elements and the beauty of the stars.<sup>13</sup> In *Paradiso* 29.70–129, Dante binds together esthetics and science and, thereby, his cosmology gives primacy to beauty. He presents an ornamental vision of the cosmos as he rediscovers the Pseudo-Dionysius’ sense of the beautiful which draws us to itself and by which we are drawn to loving the true world.

As happens in Platonic speculations, truth and beauty overlap here. The Dionysian angelic order reproduces the stable universe of Platonic essences as a ludic drama of love and knowledge: the angelic substances

appear in circles (70–78); some of the angels form singing choirs, others dance, and still others—“angelic ludi”—put on a theatrical performance. Further, at the core of the Pseudo-Dionysius’ angelology lies a Neo-platonic metaphysics of participation in a flow of light.

The model of Dante’s *cosmobook*—both folded and unfolded—works as a radical departure from the idea of the Platonic inverted cosmos. Plato’s *Phaedrus* (246 a–e) describes the procession of souls to the roof of heaven where the vision of the world is revealed. Whereas the actual world we inhabit is subject to corruption and mutability, the world above follows an unchanging pattern of being. In the *Timaeus*, the “mundus intelligibilis,” as Calcidius translates it, is also the exemplar of the sensible world.<sup>14</sup> But the example is imperfect because the likeness between archetype and copy possesses a hypothetical status only. By contrast, Dante witnesses how the original and copy of our finite world do not correspond: “. . . l’esempio / e l’esemplare non vanno d’un modo” (*Par.* 28.55–56).

In Dante’s text, the symmetry between the two spheres is flawed. Whereas in the visible universe the outer sphere spins fastest, in the spiritual universe the opposite happens: the circles of fire closest to the center wheel around at a higher speed. Beatrice measures the difference between them by the term “modo,” a word suggesting the variance in their respective rhythm of time and understanding the dissonance between the motions of the two spheres. The “alterity” of the spiritual universe in relation to the physical one casts light on the necessity of creation. In the wake of the biblical starting point, “In the beginning God created heaven, and earth”—which is a genuine beginning of the beginning—Dante turns to the metaphysics of creation as a real yet almost imperceptible event:

Poi cominciò: “Io dico, e non dimando,  
quel che tu vuoi udir, perch’ io l’ho visto  
là ’ve s’appunta ogne *ubi* e ogne *quando*.  
Non per aver a sé di bene acquisto,  
ch’esser non può, ma perché suo splendore  
potesse, risplendendo dir ‘*Subsisto*’,  
in sua eternità di tempo fore,  
fuor d’ogne altro comprender, come i piacque,  
s’aperse in nuovi amor l’eterno amore. [. . . ]”  
(*Par.* 29.10–18)

The “point” of burning light, wherein time turns into space and space into time, and from where they find their starting point, explicitly picks

up St. Thomas Aquinas' definition of eternity as an "eternal instant" (*nunc stans*) (*S.T.* 1, art. 2, ad prim., resp.) as well as the definition of indivisible unity in Aristotle's *Physics*. Dante reconciles to the utmost the possible contradictions inherent in the two ambits of knowledge, but at the same time he opens up a rift between them. Creation, which is the work of God's freedom and pleasure, is visible even in physics (which pretends not to need this doctrine). Yet, the doctrine of Creation moves beyond the limitations of the natural order. The difference between Physics and Metaphysics—between cosmology and creation—comes forth as an almost imperceptible, though inexorable, breath.

As Aquinas has it in his commentary on *Metaphysics* (12, lect. 12), the idea of creation dismantles the cosmological schemes of the physicists. The juxtaposition between the two paradigms is drastic. Writing from the double point of view of the theologian and philosopher in his *Summa contra gentiles* (2.31–38), he believed that the eternity of the world could be philosophically both demonstrated and refuted. Such a thesis is notoriously opposed by St. Bonaventure (*In Sententias* 1.44) who, against the philosophies of the naturalists, asserts the validity of the Genesis account of creation. This proposition becomes canonical with Tempier's Condemnations in 1277. In his *Breviloquium* (2.1–5), moreover, the entire *machina mundi* (world-machine) is said to have been brought into existence in time and from nothing by the First Principle. The work of creation contains within itself a celestial and a physical nature.

The language of *Paradiso* 29.10–18, recalls, as one reads in the Letter to Can Grande (Paragraph 21), both the *Liber de Causis* and the Pseudo-Dionysius, for whom creation is a passion and an act of erotic participation: the true reason for the existence of the world lies in an overflowing of divine love without jealousy. This Neo-platonic theory of love, which Dante picks up in *Paradiso* 7.64–66, is not kept at a level of abstract generality. The image of eternal love "opening up" into new loves and to time denotes—as Patrick Boyde has argued—a physical sexual embrace,<sup>15</sup> and it projects creation as a fecund dance: the cosmos opens up and vibrates in an amorous animation. Further, creation is not connected to an origin: it precedes the origin. The adjective "eterno"—from *aeviternus* (and *aeviternitas*)—subsumes within itself *aevum* (Greek *aion*) and binds together eternity and time, singularity and plurality of love. I suggest that Dante skirts here the apparent contradictions between the principle of creation

and the principle of eternity of the world embodied by the views of Aquinas and Bonaventure. No real contradiction exists between the two paradigms, since in the order of love creation coincides with natural procreation. As a matter of fact, the verb “aperse” from *aperire*, etymologically from *adpario* (to generate and bring to light as in parturition) casts creation as a child-birth, as a given rooted in nature. Such a language of creation as procreation and gift (of Metaphysics as Physics) is prefigured by the image of God the Father’s parturition of the Logos in *Par.* 13.52–54.<sup>16</sup>

The philological lexicon recalls Bernard Sylvester’s *Cosmography* which, in turn, re-writes the myth of creation both in the opening lines of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (1.5–88) and in Calcidius’ commentary on the *Physics*. Bernard Sylvester’s cosmology figures Silva, “mother of all” and “inexhaustible womb of generation,” image of a formless chaos discordant with itself preceding Creation, who longs to be born again according to the indissoluble bonds of harmony and form.<sup>17</sup> Natura, who is addressed in Marian language—“uteri mei beata fecunditas” (blessed fruitfulness of my womb)<sup>18</sup>—appears to Noys (the Intellect) so that she may behold the birth of the universe and its creatures. Plainly, Dante takes his distance from Bernard Sylvester’s fabulous astrophysics, which elevates Nature to *principium* of life. He stands closer to Alan of Lille’s image of the *osculum* sealing the marriage of matter and form (*Anticlaudianus* 1.450–55). The joining of pure form (angels without matter) and pure matter (matter without spirit), conveyed by Dante in the line “forma e materia, congiunte e purette” (*Par.* 29.22), enacts the physical-erotic theme of the School of Chartres.<sup>19</sup>

Retrospectively, in the light of this erotic vision of creation as a fertile process, we can grasp the sense of the astronomical simile and the oblique reference to the “punto” to which Francesca is suspended between the reading of her love-book and the kiss she exchanges with her lover at the beginning of *Paradiso* 29 (1–13). Physics and Metaphysics, science and myth, time and eternity, cosmos and private passion, are provisionally joined together as in a kiss. Francesca’s kiss represents the human, existential counter to the kiss of creation. The erotic-religious symbol of the kiss as the breath of life, as the Neo-platonic emblem of the “conflation” (Dante’s own term) of spirit and flesh, figures in a number of medieval texts: suffice mentioning St. Bernard’s exegesis to the Song of Songs. The kiss marks the instant in which the Creator breathes life or the *pneuma* into the universe and into the soul.<sup>20</sup>

All these assertions about the properties of the spiritual cosmos—space, motion, time, beginnings, the ordering of the angelic hierarchy, the relation between created matter and form, etc.—lead Dante to the central metaphysical question: How can the basic principles of reality be established? What is the truth-value of such a theory? Indeed, are all these claims—as much as the claim that the pilgrim sees the “altro universo”—anything more than a perspective or a personal construction he imposes on the phenomena, over and against the materialist theories of chaos, in order to give them intelligibility and coherence? Or, to say it textually, what does it mean that the Primum Mobile, as *Convivio* says, makes those planets appear, that are normally concealed from view? In a literal sense, the “appearing” of the planets refers to the origin of time and motion, which as Aristotle explains (*Physics* 4.10–14) the Primum Mobile imparts to the other physical spheres. Other senses, however, emerge from the Primum Mobile’s function of unconcealment.

Gianfranco Contini pointed out the language of truth punctuating *Paradiso* 28, without ever linking it, however, either with the questions raised by Metaphysics (traditionally known as the *episteme*, or science of truth)<sup>21</sup> or with role of images veiling and unveiling truth. In effect, the canto is framed by statements about truth. At the beginning, with her explanation about the angels, Beatrice opens up the truth: “aperse ’l vero” (*Par.* 28.2). The canto ends with a reference to the Pseudo-Dionysius who “uncovered the secret truth” (“secreto ver . . . discoperse”) (136–38). In between, the “vero” is said to be that in which the intellect’s hunger for the absolute placates itself (108). The image perceived in a mirror by the light of a two-armed candelabrum (“doppiero”) which forces the viewer to look for the reflected object (7–8), casts truth as a correspondence or *adaequatio* between reality and its image. In point of fact, Contini’s insight carries a more radical implication: truth already exists and it comes into view and appears out of the shadows. More than *adaequatio*, the mode implies the revelation of truth.

The metaphoric pattern about “truth” has another complex ramification: its relation with appearances. As if disconcerted by what she perceives as the conversion of truth into a play of appearances, Beatrice goes to the heart of the matter: the strange power of appearances, whose glitter can reverse and annul creation and thought itself. If creation means making something out of nothing, letting entities appear *ex nihilo*, appearances

threaten to make reality vanish altogether into nothing. Beatrice's perplexity comes through insistently as a warning about the illusoriness of appearances:

Voi non andate giù per un sentiero  
filosofando: tanto vi trasporta  
l'amor de l'apparenza e 'l suo pensiero! [ . . . ]  
Per apparer ciascun s'ingegna e face  
sue invenzioni . . . ”

(*Par.* 29.85–87; 94–95)

Beatrice's attack against false appearances and deceptions of philosophy in defense of “pura verità” (74) aims at bringing Metaphysics back to the earth and turning it, as *Convivio* posited, into ethics. As if to ease Beatrice's rigor (running parallel to St. Peter's denunciation in the Heaven of the Fixed Stars), *Paradiso* 30 saves appearances (indeed, it saves the principle of representation at work in the *Vita nova*) as it focuses on the beauty of Beatrice herself, that is to say, on her appearance as the inevitable locus of its epiphany and splendor.

One image from *Paradiso* 28.116, “primavera sempiterna,” used to describe the feast of the choirs of angels in terms of the earth's opening up in bloom, brings together the cluster of metaphors—the flowering of nature, the seasons of time, the openness of creation and the cosmos, truth and the intellect—holding these cantos together. Etymologically, “primavera” stems from *ver* and bears no relation to *verus* (Greek *heron*). Etymology—the science of the origin of words and a grammatical category legitimately exploited in these cantos on the sense of origins—allows a not altogether gratuitous play of associations. In the context of his reflections on the science of truth, “primavera” (which Dante, fully aware of its possible extensions, elsewhere links with Giovanna or “prima verrà”),<sup>22</sup> evokes *prima vera*, the first truths, such as those lost by Proserpine, to whom Dante refers in the symmetrically correspondent canto 28 of *Purgatorio*.<sup>23</sup> In the order of nature, truth emerges as the earth blossoms, but because it is circumscribed within the rhythm of nature, it eclipses and re-emerges with the cycle of the seasons.

The endless dialectics of openness and hiding marks Dante's figuration of cosmology and creation in the Heaven of Metaphysics. The cosmos, our knowledge of it, our relation to God and creation itself, are defined by this dialectics, which is the dialectics of truth and appearances. By this

tension running through the poem, Dante places us in a closed and yet open universe, where, as in the biblical allegory, everything appears open and yet it remains to be deciphered. These ambiguities shaping the text entail one more clarification. By virtue of these intuitions—on the curvature of space, on the cosmos modeled on the cylindrical parchment, and on the linear, square structure of a *codex*—does the poem endorse the mystical principle of *coincidentia oppositorum*, whereby beginning and end coincide and every journey inexorably lands back to its starting point?

To answer this question, we must keep in mind the distinction between the moral (or tropological) and the anagogical levels of exegesis, which Dante's theological-poetic allegory recapitulates from the rich tradition of biblical interpretation.<sup>24</sup> From the perspective of moral order, against the reduction of all distinctions to a nebulous identity, the cantos of *Metaphysics* insist on the hierarchical differences—which are degrees of knowledge, love, judgment, values, etc—and on the unity which composes all differences without abolishing them. Lucifer, diabolical caricature of the Trinity, wants to resemble it; yet, in the economy of the poem, immobilized as he is at the bottom of the universe and at the antipodes of Eden, he will never go back to his beginning. Ulysses follows the circulation of the sun, discovers the “varco” in nature and loses himself along the way, who knows where. Francesca localizes the “punto” of her erotic “universe” and ends up recognizing that only misery lasts forever, that a moment of happiness is well worth an eternity of pain in her pointless universe, and the impossible wish to make a happy, briefest instant of time last forever—but nothing more.

In the anagogical order—which concerns the eschatological relation between Creator and creatures—beginning and end logically coincide. One cannot find a thematic representation of this problem. There are, however, some sporadic signals. The word “meta” (*Par.* 27.108), as stated above, means simultaneously origin and end. Furthermore, the event of Redemption, which sustains the cosmological framework of the poem, may suggest something more. In *Paradiso* 7, Redemption as “l’atto sol del suo eterno amore” (33) ushers in the new creation: it promises a new heaven and a new earth and, through it, restores the original but provisionally lost order of the cosmos.<sup>25</sup> In the Christological encounter between the human and the Divine, anagogy dissipates the shadows of time and subsumes it within eternity. It marks the unification of nature and grace, cosmology and creation.

Dante's theological poetry constantly surprises: it summons to the Divine as the infinite dimension of freedom holding all possibilities and finiteness within itself. But it always forces us to gaze, again and again, toward the earth. God can, if so he pleases, renew all that has been given to us from the beginning.

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## NOTES

1. Useful contributions on these themes are found in Attilio Mellone, "Creazione," in *Enciclopedia dantesca*, 2.251–53; Bruno Nardi, "Se la prima material de li elementi era da Dio intesa," in *Dante e la cultura medievale* (Bari: Laterza, 1983) and Bortolo Martinelli, "La dottrina dell'Empireo nell'Epistola a Cangrande," *Studi danteschi*, 57 (1985), 49–143. See also the densely rich study of Patrick Boyde, *Dante, Philomythes and Philosopher: Man in the Cosmos* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); John Freccero, "Dante's Cosmos," *Bernardo Lecture Series* No. 6, Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (Binghamton, NY: State University of New York at Binghamton, 1998). Recently, Christian Moevs, *The Metaphysics of Dante's Commedia* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), has argued for the centrality of metaphysics in Dante's thought. For more general information on scientific questions, see David C. Lindberg, *The Beginnings of Western Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Edward Grant, "Cosmology," in *Science in the Middle Ages*, ed. David C. Lindberg (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1978), 265–276; E. Grant, *Studies in Medieval Science and Natural Philosophy* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1987); and E. Grant, *Planets, Stars, and Orbs: The Medieval Cosmos, 1200–1687* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

2. See Attilio Mellone, "Il primo mobile," in *Lectura Dantis Modenese: Paradiso* (Modena: Comitato Provinciale Dante Alighieri, Modena, 1986), 231–249. Important is the precision of metaphysic terminology supplied by Alfonso Maierù, "Atti" and "Forma," in *Enciclopedia dantesca*, 1.442–445 and 2.969–974, respectively.

3. For a deeper research into the question of space, see Edward Grant, "Place and Space in Medieval Physical Thought," in *Motion and Time, Space and Matter: Interrelations in the History of Philosophy and Science*, eds. Peter K. Machamer and Robert G. Turnbull (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1976), 138–161. Pierre Duhem's 10 volumes of *Le système du monde. Histories des doctrines cosmologiques de Platon à Copernic* (Paris: Hermann Editeurs, 1909–1916), remain fundamental.

4. The bibliography for these verses is notoriously rich. I will limit myself to indicating the contributions of Boyde, *Dante, Philomythes*, 240; Alison Cornish, *Reading Dante's Stars* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2000), 119–141; Robert Durling and Ronald Martinez, *Time and the Crystal: Studies in Dante's "Rime Petrose"* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1990), 208–209; and Moevs, 152–158.

5. That the act of Creation recalls a temporal discontinuity appears in these verses: "Nor before, as if inert, did He lie, for neither before nor after did the moving of God upon these waters proceed" (*Par.* 29.19–21), where the reference is to the story from Genesis 1:2.

6. "Quali colombe dal disio chiamate / con l'ali alzate e ferme al dolce nido" (*Inf.* 5.82–83). On the neo-platonic motif of flight in general, see the learned research of Daniela Boccassini, *Il volo della mente: falconeria e sofia nel mondo mediterraneo: Islam, Federico II, Dante* (Ravenna: Longo, 2003). See also Lino Pertile, *La punta del desio. Semantica del desiderio nella Commedia* (Fiesole: Cadmo, 2005). In



general, see Pierre Courcelle, "Quelques symboles funéraires du néoplatisme latin: Le vol de Dédale-Ulysse et les Sirenes," in *Revue des études anciennes*, 46, 1 (1944), 65–93.

7. On these traditional themes of medieval science see Duhem esp. Vol. 7; Alexandre Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins Press, 1957); and Jacques Merleau-Ponty and Bruno Morando, *The Rebirth of Cosmology*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York, New York: Knopf, 1976).

8. In recent years, dantesque cosmology has attracted the attention of diverse scientists and historians of science interested in gathering the surprising correspondence between the mathematical model of science developed in the 19th century by Georg Riemann and the Dantesque poetic invention. See Robert Osserman, *The Poetry of the Universe* (New York: Anchor Books, 1995); Mark Peterson, "Dante and the 3-Sphere," *American Journal of Physics*, 47, 12 (Dec. 1979), 1031–35; William Eggington, "On Dante, Hypersphere, and the Curvature of the Medieval Cosmos," *The Journal of the History of Ideas* 60, 2 (1999), 195–216.

9. On this argument, Emilio Pasquini writes in his edition of *La Divina commedia: Paradiso* (Milan: Garzanti, 1988), 397 n. 15: "Il verso è stato molto discusso per i supposti sovransensu allegorici del ben s'adocchi, forse allusivo della preparazione dottrina richiesta per una visione così alta. Ma più imbarazza il fatto che Dante afferma a chiare lettere nella terzina la presenza costante nel Primo Mobile di quanto gli appare, cioè di Dio insieme alle gerarchie angeliche. Poiché questo cielo non è la sede degli angeli, né si può ritenere che Dio scenda con essi incontro a Dante in questa sfera (volume), si è cercato di appianare la difficoltà interpretando il giro come la linea di confine del Primo Mobile che consentirebbe per la sua trasparenza la visione nell'Empireo del punto di fuoco contornato dai nove cerchi rotanti: ma è ipotesi di ripiego e immotivata che non risolve la questione, tuttora aperta."

10. Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi writes in her edition of Dante's *Commedia* (Milan: A. Mondadori, 1991–97) that "... questa terzina—e soprattutto questa parola [quandunque]—ha sempre costituito un problema per gli interpreti: la figura simbolica che Dante vede in questo cielo appare evidentemente qui per lui soltanto; come può dire allora che ciò pare in quel cielo "ogni volta che" si guardi al suo interno, come se quel punto e quei cerchi vi dimorassero stabilmente? Alla difficile domanda si può rispondere soltanto, crediamo, rimandando a luoghi analoghi già incontrati (cfr. XIV 108 e nota)," note 13–5 on p. 504.

11. Durandus, *Super Sententias Petri Lombardi Commentarii* II, ii, q. 4, art. 2, cited by Duhem, 1.177ff.

12. The bibliography on this topic is vast. See G. Cavallo, "Libro e pubblico alla fine del mondo antico," in G. Cavallo ed., *Libri, editori, e pubblico nel mondo antico. Guida storica e critica*. (Bari and Rome: Laterza, 1975), 81–132. C.H. Roberts and T.C. Skeat, *The Birth of the Codex* (London: Oxford University Press, 1983); and Armando Petrucci, *Writers and Readers in Medieval Italy. Studies in the History of Medieval Culture*, trans. Charles M. Radding (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1995).

13. "Graeci vero nomen mundo de ornameto accommodaverunt propter diversitatem elementorum, et pulchritudinem siderum. Appellatur enim apud eos *kosmos*, quod significat ornamentum" 13.1.2 in *Etymologiarum sive originum libri XX*, ed. W.M. Lindsay (Oxford, 1911).

14. Calcidius, *Timaeus a Calcidio translatus commentarioque instructus*, 105, eds. P. J. Jensen and J.H. Waszink (London: The Warburg Institute, 1975).

15. Boyde, 241–42.

16. "Ciò che non more e ciò che può morire / non è se non splendor di quella idea / che partorisce, amando, il nostro Sire."

17. Bernardus Silvestris, *De mundi universitate (Cosmographia)*, ed. C.S. Barach, J. Wrobel, Innsbruck, 1876. See the translation and introduction by Winthrop Wetherbee, *The Cosmographia of Bernardus Silvestris* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1973).

18. This phrase is found in *Cosmographia* (Megacosmos, chap. 2). For references to Dante, see "Nel ventre tuo si raccese l'amore, / per lo cui caldo ne l'eterna pace / così è germinato questo fiore" (*Par.* 33.7–9). More generally see Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Liturgie cosmique: Maxime Le Confesseur* (Paris: Aubier, 1947).

19. On this complex theme, see Eugenio Garin, *Studi sul platonismo medievale* (Florence: F. Le Monnier, 1958); Étienne Gilson, "La cosmogonie de Bernardus Silvestris," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge*, 3 (1928), 5–24; Tullio Gregory, *Anima Mundi. La filosofia di Guglielmo di Conches e la scuola di Chartres* (Florence: G.C. Sansoni, 1955); Marie-Therese d'Alverny, "Le cosmos symbolique du XII siècle," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge*, 28 (1953), 31–81; Winthrop Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry in the Twelfth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972); and Brian Stock, *Myth and Science in the Twelfth Century: A Study of Bernard Silvester* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972). J.M. Parent, *La doctrine de la création dans l'école de Chartres* (Paris and Ottawa: J. Vrin, 1938), remains fundamental. See also A. Maierù, previously cited in note 2 above.

20. On the archeology of the kiss, see Nicholas J. Perella, *The Kiss Sacred and Profane: An Interpretive History of Kiss Symbolism and Related Religio-Erotic Themes* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969).

21. Gianfranco Contini, "Canto XXVIII," in *Lectura Dantis Scaligera* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1968), 1001–26.

22. *Vita nuova*, 24: "E lo nome di questa donna era Giovanna, salvo che per la sua bieltade, secondo che altri crede, imposto l'era nome Primavera; e così era chiamata. . . e parve che Amore mi parlasse nel cuore, e dicesse: "Quella prima è nominata Primavera solo per questa venuta d'oggi; ché io mossi lo imponente del nome a chiamarla così Primavera, cioè prima verrà lo die che Beatrice si mosterrà dopo la imaginazione del suo fedele. E se anche vogli considerare lo primo nome suo, tanto è quanto dire 'prima verrà'. . ."

23. "Tu mi fai rimembrar dove e qual era / Proserpina nel tempo che perdette / la madre lei, ed ella primavera" (*Purg.* 28.49–51).

24. On the lexicon of allegory and Biblical exegesis, see the classic work by Henri de Lubac, *L'exégèse médiévale* (Paris: Aubier, 1959).

25. See the fine observations of Silvio Pasquazi, "Il Lucifero dantesco," in *Lectura Dantis Modenese* (Modena: Banca Popolare d'Emilia, 1984).

# “Io non Enëa, io non Paolo sono”: Ulysses, Guido da Montefeltro, and Franciscan Traditions in the *Commedia*<sup>1</sup>

RONALD HERZMAN

*“ . . . ché non torna a religione pur quelli che a santo  
Benedetto e a santo Agostino e a santo Domenico si fa  
d’abito e di vita simile, ma eziandio a buona e vera  
religione si può tornare in matrimonio stando, ché Dio  
non vuole religioso di noi se non il cuore”*

(Conv. 4.28.9)

Dante the pilgrim’s disclaimer in *Inferno* 2.32, “Io non Enëa, io non Paolo sono,” is a particularly rich and resonant line, having as it does the force of something of a gloss on the poem as a whole. Both in setting the parameters of the pilgrim’s journey to the afterlife and in providing the reader with a crisp opportunity to observe important differences between the pilgrim and Dante-poet, this and the surrounding lines provide an important interpretive gloss early on. The line lets the reader know very early in the poem, for example, that Dante-pilgrim will be taking his journey in the virtual company of two important figures who have made a similar journey before him. In addition, it suggests that the entire poem will unfold in the company of two magisterial texts that tell the story of other journeys to the afterlife: the sixth book of the *Aeneid*, which tells of Aeneas’ trip to the underworld; and 2 Corinthians 12:2–4, which in a more oblique fashion, tells the story of Paul’s trip to the third heaven: “Scio hominem in Christo ante annos quatuordecim, sive in corpore nescio, sive extra corpus nescio,

Deus scit, raptum huiusmodi usque ad tertium caelum. Et scio huiusmodi hominem sive in corpore, sive extra corpus nescio, Deus scit: quoniam raptus est in paradisum: et audivit arcana verba, quae non licet homini loqui.”

Though this line from *Inferno* 2 has been discussed at length both in its immediate context as a transitional moment between the static world of the dark wood and the dynamic world of hell proper, and in terms of its larger implications for the poem as a whole (both, to my mind, most persuasively in Rachel Jacoff and William Stephany’s discussion in *Lectura Dantis Americana Inferno II*), it is altogether unsurprising that we should continue to find new traces of its energy throughout the *Commedia*.<sup>2</sup> After all, we continue to have new sightings of the writings of Virgil and the writings of St. Paul, separately and together in the poem.<sup>3</sup> I would like to trace the energy of this line specifically to cantos 26 and 27 of the *Inferno*: I argue that as in canto 26 we find significant references to Aeneas, so in canto 27 we find equally significant references to Paul. I argue further that, just as to overcome the particular temptations posed by Ulysses in canto 26 Dante the pilgrim must in fact become another Aeneas, so also must he become another Paul as well, to deal with the equally insidious temptations posed by Guido da Montefeltro in canto 27. In examining two cantos that deal with the same sin, and that have therefore traditionally been linked together to varying degrees, I tease out the implications of that linkage from a slightly different perspective.<sup>4</sup> In particular, I argue that, if it is in fact true that Paul provides something like the same kind of presence in *Inferno* 27 that Aeneas does in canto 26, then *Inferno* 27, like 26, bears an enormous amount of weight in the architecture of the *Commedia*, especially through its treatment of Franciscan themes and perspectives. If the contours of the argument presented here are in any way accurate, canto 27 of *Inferno* builds on canto 26 in a way that has not been fully recognized. Without in any way undermining the important role that Ulysses has to play in the pilgrim’s journey (and indeed presuming that importance), I hope to show that *Inferno* 27 may well be the canto that has the most to say to the pilgrim’s own situation, because of both the way it builds on canto 26 and the way in which its concerns are located within the heart of the world to which the pilgrim must return after his journey.

## Ulysses and Guido (I)

One of the delights of Dante's *Paradiso* is that many elements of the poem come together in explicit ways which were largely implicit in the earlier canticles. The Heaven of the Sun is one place which is especially rich in this regard. We are given clues at the outset of this particularly resonant section of the poem about the way in which the created universe is put together, and those clues are followed in turn within the very structure of the Heaven of the Sun itself. And from there, the attentive reader can follow the clues still further, in that they turn out to be clues pointing toward the structure of the entire *Commedia*. What we find out, for example, from the twin circles of equator and ecliptic joined at the precisely correct oblique angle to form the building blocks of the universe, or from the twinned sages, the Dominican Thomas Aquinas telling the life of St. Francis of Assisi and the Franciscan Bonaventure telling the life of St. Dominic, or from the double pairing of twin circles of sages to form the circles of knowledge, is that the building blocks of the universe and the building blocks of knowledge itself emerge from a dialectic between sameness and difference. Anyone who has spent some time with the pilgrim in *Paradiso* in the Heaven of the Sun, and has contemplated the complexities that emerge there from this dialectic between sameness and difference, will be better equipped to see, in the retrospective structure of the poem, how carefully that same dialectic between sameness and difference operates at other points along the way.<sup>5</sup> *Inferno* 26 and 27 provide a particularly good example of this dialectic, because here are two cantos reserved for the punishment of one and the same sin, the first canto totally fixed on an ancient exemplar, the second on a modern. Ancient Ulysses and contemporary Guido da Montefeltro, false counselors, are both embedded in a tongue of flame. (I see no good reason not to use the term "false counselor" for convenience, keeping in mind both the extended debate over the term and the fact that my argument does not hinge on whether or not this term is necessarily the most exact way to specify the sin.)<sup>6</sup> There is a further parallelism-with-a-difference established by the fact that Virgil speaks to the ancient sinner, Ulysses, and Dante to his modern counterpart, Guido. We are even told by no less an authority than Virgil himself that this pairing of Virgil with Ulysses and Dante with Guido is singularly appropriate (*Inf.* 26.70–75; 27.31–33). Who better

than Virgil himself to deal with the wiles of Ulysses, since he has already provided the antitype for Ulysses in his hero Aeneas? The implication may be that Dante must learn to make himself the parallel corrective to Guido and his no less insidious wiles. The two characters, Ulysses and Guido, are linked in other straightforward ways as well. Ulysses' life ends in one of literature's most famous sea voyages. In *Inferno* 27.79–83 Guido compares life itself to a sea voyage when he talks about that time of life when one needs to lower the sails.<sup>7</sup> If life is a sea voyage, then Guido, no less than Ulysses, is shipwrecked at the end.

These rather obvious examples invite the reader to ponder more subtle ones. There is, for example, an intriguing parallel between the Trojan Horse of canto 26 and the Sicilian Bull of canto 27.<sup>8</sup> The Trojan Horse is one of the offenses for which Ulysses is being punished in hell, an archetypal example of intellect at the service of deceit. The Sicilian Bull at first seems to be less central to its canto, indeed on the surface no more than an elaborate simile providing a description for the sound of Guido da Montefeltro's voice as it emerges from within its tongue of flame: in the hollow cavern of a metal bull, the screams of the victim roasted inside are transmuted into the bellowing of a bull. For Guido, in the hollow cavern of his flame, his voice is similarly transmuted. But this rich simile is much more. It also serves as an appropriate correlative for the sins of Guido. The first victim of this instrument of torture, the test pilot as it were, turns out to be the very person who built it, and the wry comment of the poet is that his fate is utterly appropriate.<sup>9</sup> This apparently throwaway line about the unnamed artificer of the Sicilian Bull is really about a beguiler beguiled, a deceiver deceived, and is therefore in no small measure about Guido himself, who, in the process of giving the deceptive advice to Pope Boniface VIII that will allow him to defeat his enemies, is utterly oblivious to the similarly false advice that Boniface is giving to him. He becomes a victim of the same kind of false counsel that has shaped his own career. Thus the cantos mirror two hollow, man-made animals, built to enclose humans for very different but equally nefarious purposes.

The first victim of the Sicilian Bull is its builder. The first victim of the Trojan Horse meets his fate even while the horse's belly remains full of Greeks. Before he can cause any more damage to the enterprise of the Trojan Horse, the suspicious priest Laocoön is killed, and killed horribly, by sea-serpents. Given Dante's ability to appropriate the details of the *Aeneid* in the construction of the *Commedia*, it seems worth noting that in

Virgil's description of Laocoön's death in *Aeneid* 2, his cries as he is strangled are compared to the cries of a bellowing bull: "clamores simul horrendos ad sidera tollit, / qualis mugitus, fugit cum saucius aram / taurus et incertam excussit ceruice securim" ["while he lifts high his hideous cries to heaven, just like the bellows of a wounded bull when it has fled the altar, shaking off an unsure ax" (*Aen.* 2.222–24)].<sup>10</sup> Thus Virgil himself has brought together bull and horse, and Dante may well have this conjunction in mind.

Not only do these two sinners, Ulysses and Guido, occupy the same *bolgia* in hell in these cantos, but each of them in turn also has a famous partner in sin. This is one of the places where the dialectic of sameness and difference in these two cantos is most intriguing, because at first it seems to be simple difference. Ulysses is locked in a flame together with his partner in crime Diomede, while Guido's flame is a single-occupant dwelling. But, through his lengthy discourse to the pilgrim, we learn of a prior partnership in crime between Guido and Boniface VIII that has interesting parallels to the partnership between Ulysses and Diomede. This is a relationship worth exploring despite the obvious absence of Boniface as a permanent resident of this *bolgia*. Boniface "occupies" a unique place in hell. His future residence has of course already been reserved for him, at the fictional date of Dante's journey, in the canto of the simoniacs (through the prediction of Nicholas III), and we can safely assume that the poet who is writing the poem after Boniface's death in 1303 wants us to see that *bolgia* as his appropriate place of punishment in the afterlife. But setting the poem as he does in 1300, when Boniface is still alive and well and occupying the chair of Peter, Dante can allow Boniface to show up, metaphorically at least, in several different places in the *Inferno*, as if to try them out for size, or as if to say that his sins are so great and so numerous that no single place could possibly be enough to contain him.<sup>11</sup> And this is one of those places: Boniface, as I said above, is guilty of the same sort of false counsel as Guido himself.

Neither Ulysses nor Guido seems to like his partner very much. Ulysses and Diomede, we are told, "go to punishment as they went to anger," as Durling and Martinez translate it.<sup>12</sup> Guido practically asks for the damnation of Boniface ("a cui mal prenda" [*Inf.* 27. 70]). Diomede's silence puts him in the company of the other intriguing silent partners, Paolo in *Inferno* 5 and Archbishop Ruggieri in *Inferno* 33.<sup>13</sup> All the more interesting, then, is the fact that Boniface not only speaks *in propria persona* in *Inferno* 27, but

speaks at considerable length. By contrast with Diomede, about whom we can only make calculated inferences, one finds out a great deal about Boniface in *Inferno* 27 that adds to the collective construct of this pope that Dante builds throughout the poem. We will return to that construct later. Boniface is a key player in these cantos.

Perhaps the most significant set of parallels between the two cantos has to do with the way they are put together. What has just been said about the similarity between the two cantos can even be looked at as a necessary foundation for an exploration of the similarities in structure that link the account of one sinner with the other. Why is Ulysses in hell? There is a tendency to answer that question by way of Ulysses' final journey. And in some ways, rightly so, because in that final journey his character is most fully revealed, and his connection to Dante the pilgrim-voyager can most clearly be seen. And of course this section is also Dante-poet's own original contribution to the story of Ulysses, brilliantly extending Virgil as Virgil had extended Homer. But we need to balance this with what we are told about Ulysses when we first meet him in hell, if for no other reason than that we are also told explicitly that the crimes committed during the Trojan war are what has earned him (and Diomede) his place in the afterlife:

e dentro da la lor fiamma si geme  
l'agguato del caval che fê la porta  
onde uscì de' Romani il gentil seme.  
Piangevisi entro l'arte per che, morta,  
Deïdamia ancor si duol d'Achille,  
e del Palladio pena vi si porta.  
(*Inf.* 26.58–63)

This raises a question. If the earlier sins are what have earned him his place in hell, then what is the necessity for the most famous part of the narrative, the final sea voyage that ends the canto and Ulysses' life? The structure of the text provides one convincing answer, displaying Ulysses' life as an interconnected three-part narrative.<sup>14</sup> In part one, he commits fraudulent deeds during (and immediately before) the Trojan War. In part two, he comes home. But the *pietas* which is both the goal and the motive for his homecoming is not enough to keep him from his old ways. And so in part three he goes back out on his final, fatal voyage. This schematic outline, needless to say, is not meant in any way to do justice to the



richness of the narrative. My point here in presenting it as a schematic outline is simply to suggest that all three parts of the journey are necessary to understanding Ulysses. Looked at this way, his journey toward the boundless, the new, the untraveled, the unexplored must also be seen at the same time as a return to his old ways. Dante seems to be combining the Ulysses of Virgil in part one with the Odysseus of Homer, not known directly but known well enough in outline by Dante, in part two. Part three can then be seen as Dante's synthesis, in which Virgilian duplicity and Homeric grandeur are brought together.<sup>15</sup> The *pietas* which brings him home is not enough to overcome the pull of a lifetime of deception and fraud.

If one asks the same question about Guido da Montefeltro—"Why is he in hell?"—one finds a similar three-part answer. He tells us first of the "sins of the fox" committed in his earlier life, when he served as a kind of military strategist-for-hire:

Mentre ch'io forma fui d'ossa e di polpe  
che la madre mi diè, l'opere mie  
non furon leonine, ma di volpe.  
Li accorgimenti e le coperte mie  
io seppi tutte, e sì menai lor arte,  
ch'al fine de la terra il suono uscìe.

(*Inf.* 27.73–78)

Then he tells us, also in lines quoted above, of his conversion. He repents, or at least he claims to, when he thinks that the "sea voyage" of his life is coming to a close. He becomes a Franciscan friar. But then, lured by what he takes to be a Godfather-like offer from Boniface VIII, complete with its extraordinary bonus of absolution in advance, he returns to his old ways, giving Boniface the advice he sought and thereby committing the sin of fraud which brings him to hell. As is true with Ulysses, a conversion is not able to withstand the habits of a lifetime. For both sinners, the outline of their moral life reveals an Aristotelian conception of virtue and vice on the part of Dante-poet. The allure of habits long nourished and cherished is simply greater than anything that a tepid conversion has to offer. But even here, there is difference within sameness in the two cantos. For Ulysses the obligations to and comforts of father, wife, and son have no more than a temporary pull, and, bored with his tripartite domesticity, he sets out for new adventures. *Pietas* may not have been

enough, but at least it was there to some degree: it brought him home and kept him there for a little while. There is less reason to be sure about Guido's conversion. It surely can be read, and the text is richer if it is read, as a false conversion, a conversion in outer surface only. By putting on the habit of a friar, Guido hopes to obliterate the habits of a lifetime, but by wearing the right costume rather than by genuine repentance. By putting on a Franciscan habit, Guido applies to a different kind of situation the same instrumental tactics that he has used throughout his life, another example of the deeds of the fox that he had used so successfully until then. This is for him the way the world works, the way one wins the battle of life, and he seems to have no way of thinking apart from the deeds of the fox. In fact, Guido's phrasing suggests that this "conversion" was his attempt to undertake the ultimate scam—that this was Guido's attempt to deceive God himself: "and it would have worked" is the way that Durling and Martinez translate the passage. But this attempt to outwit God may have been no more than the indirect consequence of Guido continuing to be who he has always been. The attempt to deceive God is the indirect consequence of a more direct deception: he has first and foremost deceived himself.<sup>16</sup>

### **"Io non Enëa"**

It is something of a commonplace to observe that Aeneas is a constant presence throughout the account of Ulysses in *Inferno* 26. In going through the evidence for this presence in a systematic way, a new context might provide some additional energy for these observations, but, more important, these observations create the framework for describing the parallel and equally important (though less frequently noted) presence of Paul in *Inferno* 27.

To begin with the obvious, Ulysses himself evokes Aeneas. Ulysses' journey and Aeneas' journey are linked by the evocation of Aeneas' name at the beginning of Ulysses' own description of his journey home:

"Quando  
mi diparti' da Circe, che sottrasse  
me più d'un anno là presso a Gaeta,  
prima che sì Enëa la nomasse . . ."  
(*Inf.* 26.90–93)

In an interesting rhetorical flourish, Ulysses gives a geography lesson by naming a place that had not yet been named when he himself came there. Or, to turn it around, Gaeta was named by Aeneas, but Aeneas had not yet been there at the time of Ulysses' journey. We have only come to know Gaeta in terms of its post-Homeric, post-Ulyssean history. So it is Aeneas' journey which allows us to orient ourselves. The naming of Gaeta reminds us of the degree to which one journey is the analogue of the other, the degree to which Virgil has built on Homer.<sup>17</sup> But we would be wrong to leave it at that. This geographical reference proposes to the reader that there is something authoritative about Aeneas' journey. Ulysses' journey may have come first, but in Dante's retelling it needs to be judged in the light of Aeneas'. And so it is in no way surprising that each of the three parts of Ulysses' story outlined above has very strong Virgilian resonances.

It is ironic that Virgil is speaking, because most of what he says is by way of summarizing his own poem.<sup>18</sup> In answer to the question "who is here?" Virgil, in his role as Dante's guide, explains to the pilgrim that it is Ulysses and Diomedes. He gives three reasons for their punishment, two of which are in fact events narrated in Book 2 of the *Aeneid*: the Trojan Horse and the theft of the Palladium. These are not simply important events from the *Aeneid*; these are events concerning which Aeneas himself can claim a proprietary interest, since we learn about them through his own first person narrative to Dido and the court of Carthage in *Aeneid* 2. And from Aeneas' first-person perspective, these are crimes that do not stop at the threshold of sacrilege. Moreover, the Trojan Horse is presented by telescoping history and viewing that single event in terms of its unique, providentially important, long-term result: it is the first in a sequence of events that ends with the founding of Rome. The quotation leaves out the entire middle—long years and difficult journeys and many generations—as though it were only a small step from Troy to Rome ("... l'agguato del caval che fé la porta / onde uscì de' Romani il gentil seme" [*Inf.* 26.59–60]). In Dante's focused retelling Ulysses and Aeneas, one through treachery, the other through *pietas*, are collaborators in the very deed which the pilgrim explicitly cites in *Inferno* 2 as the sign of his own unworthiness to take a journey to the afterlife.

The second part of the narrative, the homecoming, is both Homeric and anti-Homeric at the same time. The homecoming of Odysseus / Ulysses, the climax of the *Odyssey*, is not explicitly part of the *Aeneid*.

Yet in *Inferno* 26, Ulysses' homecoming is described in terms of a moral framework that is thoroughly Virgilian. Both perspectives, Homeric and Virgilian, are necessary, because unless one sees the importance of the homecoming in its Homeric version, Ulysses' failure to honor its terms will be underestimated. Dante sets up the complex rhetorical structure that allows us to read Ulysses' words from an ironic distance that keeps us from being seduced by them. Ulysses comes home to his wife Penelope, to his son, and to his father. But:

né dolcezza di figlio, né la pieta  
del vecchio padre, né 'l debito amore  
lo qual dovea Penelopè fa lieta,  
vincer potero dentro a me l'ardore  
ch'i' ebbi a divenir del mondo esperto  
e de li vizi umani e del valore.

(*Inf.* 26.94–99)

The first thing in this passage that speaks to a reader of Vergil is Dante's appropriation of the word *pieta*, significantly attached here to Ulysses' relationship with his father. The relationship between Aeneas and his father Anchises in the *Aeneid* is, after all, the place where Virgilian *pietas* is most firmly anchored. Aeneas does not let even the gates of the underworld sever his bond with father Anchises. Having found his father safe in Ithaca, Ulysses, on the other hand, decides that this reunion is insufficient to keep him home and seeks out adventure elsewhere. It likewise seems not much of a stretch to apply the word *pieta* to Ulysses' relationship with his son and his wife as well, because of the way the three are linked together in Dante's passage. Indeed, one can hardly read Ulysses' lines here without visualizing the tableau of *pietas* so memorably drawn by Vergil at the end of *Aeneid* 2, as Aeneas, father, son, and wife all prepare to leave conquered Troy:

Tu, genitor, cape sacre manu patriosque penatis . . .  
Haec fatus latos umeros subiectaque colla  
ueste super fuluique insternor pelle leonis  
succedoque oneri; dextrae se paruos Iulus  
implicuit sequiturque patrem non passibus aequis;  
pone subit coniunx.

(*Aen.* 2.717; 721–25)

“‘My father, you will carry the holy vessels and our homeland's gods’ . . . This said, I spread a tawny lion skin across my bent neck, over my broad shoulders,

and then take up Anchises; small Iulus now clutches my right hand; his steps uneven, he is following his father; and my wife moves on behind."

The beginning of Aeneas' journey is ironically recalled at what should have been the end of Ulysses'.<sup>19</sup> Dante is able to superimpose an important Vergilian ekphrasis on Homer to show that what is Aeneas' entire ethos is no more than a momentary, suspensory pause for Ulysses before he moves on—backward to his old ways and forward to his doom.

This doom at the end of Ulysses' three-part story is of course Dante's original and daring addition to the tradition of Ulysses. But Dante's ending is infused with Virgil's beginning. What helps provide the reader with a moral compass for evaluating Ulysses' final journey and shipwreck is the shipwreck of Aeneas and his crew at the very beginning of the *Aeneid*. The shipwreck that ends Ulysses' life has strong resonances with the shipwreck of *Aeneid* 1, whereby Aeneas and his crew are blown off course and make their fateful emergency landing at Carthage. The speech that Aeneas makes to his crew to counter their despair and to buoy their spirits as they abort their voyage is, in its outward form, the prototype for the speech that Ulysses gives to convince his men to begin theirs. In both, a confident and eloquent outward presentation masks a quite different inner reality. Aeneas masks his own anxieties and fears and his own pull toward despair in order to encourage his men. The discrepancy between appearance and reality is an illustration of his leadership and an exemplification of his *pietas*. His own impulses are subjected to the higher pull of duty. ("Talia voce refert curisque ingentibus aeger / spem uoltu simulat, premit altum corde dolorum"; "These are his words; though sick with heavy cares, he counterfeits hope in his face; his pain is held within, hidden" [*Aen.* 1.208–9]).<sup>20</sup> Precisely the opposite is true for Ulysses. He exhorts his men in order to impose his own will on them only to achieve his own purposes—his own desires. These men are too old for the journey beyond boundaries and toward the unknown that Ulysses proposes. Essentially he wants to use them as galley-slaves, and since they have no other function for him except as a means to his own ends, it makes no difference to him that they are not up to the task. All his talk about knowledge and valor has nothing to do with what ultimately happens to them.<sup>21</sup> His is the archetypal dishonest politician's speech: he says "we" but he really means "I." When he says that they are all in this together, what he really means is that they are all in it for him. Unlike Aeneas, Ulysses' masking of his

true intent is not a sign of *pietas*, it is an emblem of his treachery, his fraud, his false counsel, his hubris. And since this is, of course, the great temptation for any gifted rhetorician who has an interest in politics, Ulysses' ability to manipulate others to his own will is a prime reason why Ulysses is such a "lightning rod" for the concerns of Dante: Dante has the capacity to lead those who follow him off course, and, in Peter Hawkins' phrase, Ulysses is a warning to Dante against the demonic use of his own talents.<sup>22</sup> It simply needs to be underscored that, important as all this is as a warning to Dante, Dante comes to Ulysses in large part through the intermediary of Aeneas, both implicitly and explicitly.

### **"To non Paolo sono"**

When in *Inferno* 27 Guido da Montefeltro tells us, midway through the narrative of the journey of his life, that it was time for him to lower the sails and rethink the kind of life he has lived, he is, as we have already observed, comparing his life to a sea journey that is nearing its end, thus linking his story to the literal sea journey that brings Ulysses to hell. The parallels outlined earlier suggest that one story is enriched to the extent that it is seen in terms of the other. But the sea voyages of the *Aeneid* which provide the antitype for Ulysses now give way to the voyages (and shipwrecks) of the Acts of the Apostles, as Guido enacts a kind of demonic inverse Pauline typology.<sup>23</sup> What is common to both is that each shipwreck, literal and metaphoric, brings its captain to hell, and to the same place in hell at that. But this second shipwreck is inscribed within a narrative of conversion that is at the center of Guido's account, even as a narrative of conversion is at the center of Paul's life: Guido's conversion is shaped so as to be seen in relation to the most famous and important conversion in Christian history. First, we need to remind ourselves of the story itself, as well as its importance to Dante. The conversion is of course famously told in the Acts of the Apostles. I quote the most relevant parts of the story, told first as a story about Paul and then as Paul's own story:

Saulus autem adhuc spirans minarum, et caedis in discipulos Domini, accessit ad principem sacerdotum, et petiit epistolas in Damascus ad synagogas: ut si quos invenisset huius viae viros, ac mulieres, vinctos perducerent in Ierusalem. Et cum iter faceret, contigit ut appropinquaret Damasco: et subito circumfulsit eum lux de caelo. Et cadens in terram audivit vocem dicentem sibi: Saule, Saule, quid me persequeris? (Acts 9:14)

Factum est autem, eunte me, et appropinquante Damasco media die subito de caelo circumfulsit me lux copiosa: et decidens in terram, audivi vocem dicentem mihi: Saule, Saule, quid me persequeris? . . . Et cum non viderem prae claritate luminis illius, ad manum deductis a comitibus, veni Damascum (Acts 22:6–7, 11).

In quibus dum irem Damascum cum potestate et permissu principum sacerdotum, die media in via, vidi, rex, de caelo supra splendorum solis circumfulsisse me lumen, et eos qui mecum erant (Acts 26: 12–13).<sup>24</sup>

To understand how this foundational conversion story provides an important guide to understanding the meaning of Guido's life, and subsequently to the life of Dante-pilgrim, we need to focus the story told thus far by emphasizing the huge role that Boniface VIII plays in it.

Quando mi vidi giunto in quella parte  
di mia etade ove ciascun dovrebbe  
calar le vele e raccoglièr le sarte,  
ciò che pria mi piacēa allor m'increbbe,  
e pentuto e confesso mi rendei;  
ahi miser lasso! e giovato sarebbe.  
(*Inf.* 27.79–83)

One could of course argue that Guido's conversion was real, that he did in fact confess with due sincerity and only later apostatized when Boniface made his offer and he went back to his old, sinful ways. But, as I have argued above, it is a richer and more resonant story if we view the repentance as a matter of tactics rather than conviction. Guido has been living the life of a tactician for so long that he has no other way of relating to the world and, consciously or not, he now decides upon another stratagem: he attempts to deceive God, and thereby "strategize" his way into heaven. Ulysses goes back to his old ways because that is who he is. Guido never really leaves his old ways, because that is who *he* is. At any rate, this interpretation heightens the irony of the third part of Guido's story, because it is in no small measure about how Guido himself is deceived by Boniface. If anyone ought to know that one has to be sorry for a sin to have it forgiven, it is a Franciscan friar, and that is what Guido, at least in name, has become. But part of the point of this story is that if he had *really* become a Franciscan in anything more than a Franciscan habit he would have seen, and seen easily, how hollow, how meaningless was the offer

from Boniface. Equally significant, there is something especially “infernal” about his response here. Like so many other important characters in hell, he blames something or someone else for his behavior—he blames Pope Boniface, and even goes so far as to take offense at Boniface’s crimes, as though focusing on them somehow deflects from the magnitude of his own. As early as *Inferno* 5, a sinner pointedly places blame elsewhere: Francesca da Rimini is the first of several sinners who explicitly employ this marker of their own lack of repentance, saying, in effect “a book made me do it.” In canto 13, Pier della Vigna blames envy, and in canto 15 Brunetto Latini says it is all in the stars anyway, implicitly denying his own responsibility along with everyone else’s. Here Guido da Montefeltro, following his infernal predecessors in their pointed denial of responsibility, says “the pope made me do it.” It would be hard to find a more impressive scapegoat. But part of my argument is that it is likewise hard to take Guido’s anger at face value, or at least hard not to see the irony, when we keep in mind the fact that Guido is someone who has tried to do to God what Boniface did to him. If circumstances were better for him, he might admire the technique of a fellow-tactician, and give Boniface credit where credit is due. After all, his own attempt to scam God ultimately fails, while Boniface’s has worked all too well. And perhaps in a less infernal context he might have been able to appreciate the irony. But of course that is not how it works in hell, where sinners are defined by their inability to see that what they say about others applies with equal force to themselves. Ugolino’s account of Ruggieri’s betrayal, counter-betrayal, and treachery surely tells us as much about Ugolino as it does about Ruggieri.

Guido’s accusations against Boniface, then, clearly ring hollow as a means of self-exculpation. But they ring true as a description of Boniface, providing yet another perspective from which to view the enormity of Boniface’s sins and their consequences. It is not the first time in hell that a sinner gets upset at this pope’s sins. In *Inferno* 19, Pope Nicholas III, a polished practitioner of the art of simony, speaks of Boniface’s simony with such outrage as to make it sound as though he himself is no more than a mere apprentice in that art. Mistaking Dante for Boniface, he says:

. . . Se’ tu già costì ritto,  
Se tu già costì ritto, Bonifazio?  
Di parecchi anni mi mentì lo scritto.



Se' tu sì tosto di quell'aver sazio  
per lo qual non temesti torre a 'nganno  
la bella donna, e poi di farne strazio?

(*Inf.* 19.52–57)

Here too in *Inferno* 27, Guido as false counselor implies that, compared to Boniface, he is a mere apprentice. Taken together these two passages suggest that some conspicuously bad sinners in hell look to Boniface as their master. Praise from experts: if such polished practitioners of the art of sinning both think that he is that much better at it than they are, he must be bad indeed.

But as serious sinners, Guido and Boniface are linked by much more than the art of false counseling. Guido's complaint against Boniface has a kind of "while we are at it" quality, in which he summarizes the worst sins of Boniface, or at least the worst consequences of the enterprise in which they were mutually engaged. Boniface needed Guido to help him defeat his enemies, the Colonna family and their allies, who, in their war against Boniface, had retreated to the safety of the city of Palestrina.<sup>25</sup> In exchange for the bogus offer of absolution in advance, Guido gives him the advice which enables him to do so. But Guido takes the opportunity to tell us what a nasty business it all is:

Lo principe d'i novi Farisei,  
avendo guerra presso a Laterano,  
e non con Saracin né con Giudei,  
ché ciascun suo nimico era cristiano,  
e nessun era stato a vincer Acri  
né mercatante in terra di Soldano,  
né sommo officio né ordini sacri  
guardò in sé, né in me quel capestro  
che solea fare i suoi cinti più macri.

(*Inf.* 27.85–93)

Clearly Dante-poet wants to foreground the scandal of Christians fighting fellow Christians, underscoring as he does the fact that the fighting starts at the top with the spiritual head of Christendom. In *Inferno* 19, the simoniac popes who have used their spiritual office to get rich are being punished. In *Inferno* 27, one sees what is perhaps the most serious consequence of that ill-gotten wealth: it provides the resources necessary for the powerful armies that enable Boniface to successfully make war on his fellow

Christians. It is a scandal to which we will return later. But it is surely important to emphasize the irony inherent in criticism coming directly from the mouth of Guido da Montefeltro. For in this particular scandal, he himself has played no small part, his very advice enabling Boniface to defeat his enemies. The irony can be paraphrased as follows: "Can you imagine anything worse than what Boniface is up to, making war on fellow Christians—with the advice that I gave him?" So, once again, a stark example of what it means to lose the good of intellect in hell. Much of the energy of these lines lies in the fact that Guido seems completely unaware that, along with Boniface, he is necessarily condemning himself.

But we readers are not unaware. No less than Boniface, Guido himself, complaining loudest about his own sins, has made a life out of waging war on his fellow Christians. Indeed, one of the things that adds to his indictment of Boniface is that through his self-confessed deeds, the deeds of the fox rather than the lion ("l'opere mie / non fur leonine ma di volpe" [*Inf.* 27.74–75]), he has in fact been making war on fellow Christians all his life. It is precisely in this that we can see the crucial link between Guido and Saul / St. Paul, another infamous persecutor of Christians. Guido is St. Paul, but without the results of Paul's conversion. Guido is Paul but only through infernal parody. In Acts, one finds in the paradigmatic Christian conversion story a strange and miraculous change, as Saul the active persecutor becomes Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, the most important and successful proselytizer in Christian history. Guido, an active persecutor of Christians, is "converted," puts on the robes of a Franciscan, and after a short interval becomes—an active persecutor of Christians. Two pilgrims *in via*, but with opposite results: Paul struck down unexpectedly on the road to Damascus; Guido converted at a convenient moment, almost a calculated moment, in his sea voyage of life: "Io non Paolo sono."

Once one sees the conversion at the center of Guido's story as an inversion of Paul's, other connections with Paul become apparent. The most complex and interesting of these is Guido's dramatic narration of the struggle for his soul—a kind of externalized psychomachia—which takes place after his death, with Francis and a devil each claiming possession:

Francesco venne poi, com' io fu' morto,  
per me; ma un d'i neri cherubini  
li disse: 'Non portar, non mi far torto.

“‘Venir se ne dee giù tra ’ miei meschini  
perché diede ’l consiglio frodolente,  
dal quale in qua stato li sono a’ crini;  
ch’assolver non si può chi non si pente,  
né pentere e volere insieme puossi  
per la contradizion che nol consente.’  
O me dolente! Come mi riscossi  
quando mi prese, dicendomi: ‘Forse  
tu non pensavi ch’io löico fossi!’”

(*Inf.* 27.112–23)

To give the passage the emphasis it deserves, I start with a naïve but utterly appropriate question asked a few years ago by one of my students: “would St. Francis of Assisi *really* have thought that Guido’s soul was going to heaven?” In other words, what are we to make of this struggle, the ending of which from a divine perspective had to be a foregone conclusion? (And therefore, could it really have in fact taken place the way Guido describes it?) It is possible to see this mini-morality play simply as Guido’s fantasy rather than the way that it really happened, to see it as yet another sign of his megalomania.<sup>26</sup> If he can flirt with fooling God, trying to fool Francis would be no great surprise. And convincing himself that heaven can be won by tactics would be the logical result. This conclusion would simply be the logical consequence of his instrumental way of thinking. He has received absolution, so naturally he is going to go to heaven. His escort to heaven in the company of Francis, or rather, his description of his escort to heaven, is the fulfillment of the fantasy that begins with his putting on the Franciscan habit. Maybe. But there are other, complementary, ways to think about this scene.

Certainly there are other places in the poem where Dante is willing to take theological liberties for the sake of deeper poetic truths. One of the most intriguing occurs close to the end of *Inferno*, in canto 33, with the story of Frate Alberigo. When Dante-pilgrim meets the shade of Frate Alberigo, he is confused because to the best of his knowledge Alberigo is still alive. What he finds out is that even though Alberigo’s body is in fact still walking around on earth, his soul has already dropped to hell, replaced by a devil that continues to animate his body. In this encounter, the theological possibility of final repentance gives way to a larger poetic possibility: an inversion and parody of the Eucharist and its doctrine of the real presence to suggest that the evil that Dante finds in hell is also present,

incarnate, on earth.<sup>27</sup> Here, in *Inferno* 27, Franciscan compassion would not, logically or theologically, really prevent Francis from knowing of Guido's damnation; but presenting Francis coming for the soul of Guido does allow for a dramatized outward psychomachia charged with interesting possibilities.

First of all, it shows how bad things have become simply from the point of view of spiritual economy. How are sins forgiven? The most basic aspect of the "mechanics" of repentance is that one has to be sorry for a sin in order to obtain forgiveness: one can't repent and simultaneously will the sin, as Guido does. In the discussion of repentance that takes place in *Inferno* 27, there is a pope, there is a Franciscan friar, and there is a devil. Only one of them gets it right. Which one? The devil, of course, who interrupts Guido's ascent to heaven with a little bit of elementary theology. Dante dramatizes a grim joke with a grim punch line, namely that those who should know don't, or alternatively, those who do know don't really care. Elementary theological knowledge, "Penance 101," as it were, goes by the boards—for both Guido and Boniface—when one's real concerns are wheeling and dealing on a large scale. This scene thus continues *Inferno* 19's discussion of the consequences of bad spiritual rule, with Boniface VIII serving again as the key player.

Second, bringing in Francis himself provides a convenient opening to introduce some important Franciscan lore that resonates throughout these two cantos and indeed throughout the *Comedy* as a whole. In fact, there is an important Franciscan precedent for the incident, one which also bends theological truth for the sake of a larger truth about Francis. For Dante's narrative is in line with Franciscan theology as it is displayed in at least one dramatic and important incident in the Franciscan hagiographical tradition. In the splendid frescoes of twenty-eight scenes from the life of Francis that decorate the upper church in the Basilica of San Francesco in Assisi, one scene bears a striking similarity to Dante's portrayal of Guido's account of his own death. The last four scenes in the cycle are scenes of posthumous miracles. Scene twenty-seven shows a woman who has miraculously been raised from the dead by Francis to allow her another opportunity to go to confession. She is in the center of the room, in the process of confessing her sins to a friar. To the right and to the left are mourners and those who have come to perform the funeral rites. Above the woman, an angel, coming for the soul of the woman, drives away a demon who presumably got there first to pick up his prey. In the upper

left hand corner is Francis, interceding for the woman before the throne of Christ. Posthumous possibilities, the appearance of Francis, the sacrament of confession, the demon, the struggle for the soul—all these Dantesque elements are there in the Assisi fresco, but of course with an altogether different ending. This scene powerfully shows the importance of repentance as part of the message of Francis (a major theme in the Assisi cycle), the power of Francis as an intercessor, the mercy of Christ. Against this background, the reconfiguration of the scene in the *Commedia* takes on added depth. For it suggests that playing fast and loose with the rules of penance on the part of Guido (and on the part of Boniface, too) is a particular offense against both the letter and spirit of Francis's life. It suggests as well that Guido's presumption, in both the literal and theological senses of that word, can be measured against a merciful Francis pleading before an even more merciful God.<sup>28</sup> To see that God's mercy is not applicable to Guido is to see that Guido has made himself impervious to God's mercy. Francis' intercession is there ready and waiting for those who really want it, but that does not include Guido, no matter what habit he is wearing.<sup>29</sup>

Third, bringing in Francis helps to explain and complete the reference to the prophet Elijah in the previous canto, since Elijah is one of the most frequently utilized Old Testament types for Francis in the tradition of Franciscan hagiography. One verbal and one visual example can serve to make a point that that could be strengthened by literally scores of examples from the Franciscan tradition. For the verbal example, one need go no farther than the Prologue to Bonaventure's definitive life of Francis, the *Legenda Maior*, to see that Francis is someone who has come in the spirit of Elijah.<sup>30</sup> And in another fresco from the Assisi cycle, Francis appears in the figure of Elijah, literally inside Elijah's chariot as he appears to his brethren. The eighth of the twenty-eight stories from the life and miracles of Francis that decorate the upper Basilica shows Francis, occupying most of the upper register of this fresco, appearing miraculously to some friars at Rivo Torto. He, the chariot he stands within, and the horse, are all flaming red. Thus the reference to Elijah in *Inferno* 26 provides another connection between cantos:

E qual colui che si vengìo con li orsi  
vide 'l carro d'Elia al dipartire,  
quando i cavalli al cielo erti levorsi . . .

tal si muove ciascuna per la gola  
del fosso, che nessuna mostra 'l furto,  
e ogni fiamma un peccatore invola.  
(*Inf.* 26. 34–36; 40–42)

That reference to Elijah and his flaming chariot is used to describe the tongues of fire which are the punishment for Ulysses and Diomedes and by extension all the sinners in this *bolgia*. It has of course also been noted that the flames of punishment for the sinners in this *bolgia* are an inversion of the tongues of fire at Pentecost, and so it is worth adding to that observation the importance of Pentecost in Franciscan iconography. The coming of the friars with their mission to reform the church and to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth was characteristically depicted as a new Pentecost.<sup>31</sup> Guido the false friar is appropriately punished—even more appropriately than Ulysses, one might be tempted to say—within the flame of a false Pentecost.<sup>32</sup>

Fourth, this posthumous externalized psychomachia connects Guido with another vivid psychomachia in the poem, the story of Guido's own son, Bonconte da Montefeltro which is described in *Purgatorio* 5. The logician / devil who is able to carry off his prey in *Inferno* 27 becomes a slightly less logical and less effective devil in *Purgatorio* 5: by railing against heaven for stealing what he believes was rightfully his, he pointedly ignores the very logic of repentance that the devil so convincingly used in the previous episode. If true repentance rather than its counterfeit is necessary for salvation, then the devil should recognize the validity of true repentance when it is in fact there, as it is in the case of Buonconte.<sup>33</sup> Buonconte da Montafeltro, unlike his father a warrior of the lion rather than the fox variety, dies at the battle of Campaldino at the hands of the Florentine Guelphs (a point we will come back to later.) He makes a death-bed conversion:

La 've 'l vocabol suo diventa vano,  
arriva' io forato ne la gola,  
fuggendo a piede e sanguinando il piano.  
Quivi perdei la vista e la parola;  
nel nome di Maria fini', e quivi  
caddi, e rimase la mia carne sola.  
Io dirò vero, e tu 'l ridi tra ' vivi:  
l'angel di Dio mi prese, e quel d'inferno  
gridava: 'O tu del ciel, perchè mi privi?

Tu te ne porti di costui l'eterno  
per una lagrimetta che 'l mi toglie;  
ma io farò de l'altro altro governo.  
(*Purg.* 5.97–108)

The devil's logic may no longer be very sharp, but the larger logic of the poem as it relates to the mechanics of repentance is quite precise. Insincere repentance, even if accompanied by the absolution of a pope, leads to hell. Sincere repentance, even if made by a very great sinner, even if made at the moment of death, even if made literally on the run, leads to Purgatory and ultimately to heaven. The twin tableaux of father and son, damned and saved by their own choices, is very effective.

Fifth, and most important for our purposes, this pseudo-psychomachia takes place on the way to heaven. This is an *ascensus interruptus*, an abortive version of the journey that Paul successfully makes in 2 Corinthians, the journey that Dante refers to at the beginning of *Inferno*, and the journey that Dante ultimately uses as the model of his own journey in *Paradiso*. In talking about *Inferno* 2, Jacoff and Stephany have succinctly captured the importance of the two journeys to the afterlife, that of Aeneas and that of Paul:

In linking St. Paul with Aeneas, Dante establishes a typological relationship of both comparison and contrast. Like both of them, Dante is about to be granted a privileged vision and to embark upon a mission of universal scope; however, the relationship to Aeneas remains a qualified one compared to the Pauline parallel. Aeneas in his *Descensus ad Elysium* becomes the type fulfilled in Paul's *Ascensus in Paradisum* and reenacted in Dante's experience in the *Commedia*.<sup>34</sup>

To which we can now add: the parodic *Descensus ad Elysium* in canto 26, with the shipwreck of Ulysses, is fulfilled in the parodic *Ascensus in Paradisum* of Guido da Montefeltro and its diabolic intervention in *Inferno* 27. Each canto thus provides us with a key antitype of Dante's journey, and therefore each canto has an enormous amount to say about the pilgrim's journey.

## Ulysses and Guido (II)

Recent scholarship tends to see Ulysses as a central, if not *the* central figure in the *Inferno* for defining or at least providing a commentary on the journey of the pilgrim. As Martinez and Durling have succinctly put

it in the notes to *Inferno* 26 in their edition of the poem, “. . . there is no doubt that Ulysses’ voyage provides the most important and frequently recalled antitype to the pilgrim’s own voyage to the other world.”<sup>35</sup> Or again, as Barolini has memorably phrased it, Ulysses is the lightning rod for the pilgrim’s anxieties and concerns in the *Commedia*.<sup>36</sup> That we have for the most part seen Ulysses through the lens of Aeneas here in this study may refocus this position a bit, but does nothing to undermine it, and indeed may provide some additional support for it, if additional support is needed. How can we best move to the claim made earlier, namely that the “voyage” of Guido is at least as important as that of Ulysses to the concerns of Dante the pilgrim and to the concerns of the *Commedia*?<sup>37</sup>

It seems like a claim worth investigating. If Jacoff and Stephany are right in their assertion that Aeneas’ descent is fulfilled in Paul’s ascent, and if I am right in seeing direct and specific parodic inversions of these two otherworldly adventures at the end of *Inferno* 26 and 27, then we need to focus our attention on the further implications of these aborted journeys for the pilgrim. One way to begin is by suggesting that Aeneas and Paul, Ulysses and Guido, speak to the pilgrim in rather different ways. Ulysses is “archetypal Dante”; Guido is “existential Dante.” Which is to say, Ulysses’ journey is about heroic discovery, and Guido’s is about dealing with Boniface VIII and the larger issues of the papacy in Dante’s time. Ulysses’ journey is about *pietas*, and Guido’s is about the sacrament of penance at the end of the thirteenth century. Ulysses’ journey is about true and false knowledge, and Guido’s is about true and false Franciscans. I do not want to overdo this scheme; in essence these are differences of degree rather than of kind, but there is an important distinction here. Of course both Ulysses and Guido, and their cantos, are also in fundamental ways about false rhetoric. Those studies that show how abuse of rhetoric on the part of Ulysses is matched by a similar abuse of rhetoric on the part of Guido thus make an implicit case for the importance of Guido as a negative *exemplum* for the pilgrim. But the abuse of rhetoric that is perpetrated by Guido is never given the same status as a “lightning rod” for the pilgrim and his concerns. Peter Hawkins, for example, says that “[p]erhaps nowhere more powerfully than in the figure of Ulysses, he [Dante] issues a warning against the demonic possibilities of his own talent. It is a warning that words, whether spoken or written, have the power to create worlds no less dangerous than one in which we live and through whose waters we navigate our course.”<sup>38</sup> I have not come across a similarly



strong statement about the power of words in the figure of Guido. One important reason for this is that Guido never sounds heroic in the way that Ulysses does, and therefore—though the threat is there—one would be less likely to see Guido's specious rhetoric as a threat directly related to someone like Dante, who is himself capable of echoing heroic grandeur by, say, writing an epic poem. And of course Guido does not carry with him anything like the mythical status of Ulysses. Dante daringly redirects the already mythical literary afterlife of Ulysses; by contrast, he creates the literary afterlife of Guido. Ulysses' history has already been transformed into myth, while Guido's history is really not yet history at all; from the point of view of Dante's journey it is almost the current news of the day. It is crucial to underscore the degree to which the issues that Guido and Boniface are directly implicated in are the issues that Dante is likewise implicated in directly, in a way that is not true for the ancient story, however resonant and powerful.

Most importantly, Guido's encounter with Boniface can be seen in relation to Dante's own troubled relationship with Boniface. This linkage brings the events that connect Dante directly to Boniface into the inner dynamic of the poem, into the larger rhythms of Dante's own conversion. Guido's task, the task that seals his condemnation to hell, is to teach Boniface how to make war on his fellow Christians. In 1302, Dante's task was (or, from within the fiction of the poem, will be) precisely to prevent this from happening. As Giuseppe Mazzotta has succinctly described it, in outlining the events that led up to Dante's exile in his brief account of Dante's life:

"Pope Boniface VIII, angered by the decision which he saw as favoring his enemies [recalling the White Guelphs] solicited Charles of Valois, the brother of Philip, then king of France, to intervene militarily in Italy. When Charles was in Italy, the Florentines dispatched three emissaries to the Papal court in Rome to persuade the pope to keep the French king from entering Tuscany. One of the Ambassadors was Dante, who, while in Rome, was sentenced to death on March 10, 1302. Dante was sent into exile, which was to last until his death in 1321."<sup>39</sup>

Guido's story is as much about Dante as Ulysses' is.

If the result of Dante's failure in his mission to Boniface was exile from Florence, that is a better fate than Guido's success in *his* mission, the more permanent exile of hell. It is a better fate for Dante not least because exile will also result in the poem.<sup>40</sup> But in order for Dante to learn the lessons

of exile, to learn, within the retrospective structure of the poem, how to turn exile into pilgrimage, Guido, anti-Paul, persecutor of Christians, must teach him about the nature of his journey just as surely as does Ulysses. If Ulysses embodies the powerful temptation of all the improper uses of Dante's rhetorical and intellectual talents, Guido embodies the equally powerful temptation of all the improper uses of his political talents. Or, perhaps better, Guido represents the temptation for Dante to misuse his great intellectual talents in the political affairs in which he is actually immersed but which are also inseparable from the substance of his poem. Dante *in via*, Dante in 1300, is someone who will soon be forced to act within a very complicated set of political circumstances. Dante is not Guido: far from aiding Boniface, in 1302 he tries to prevent him from making war on his fellow Christians. But it is worth inquiring further into what is implied by making war on one's fellow Christians. When a pope makes war on his fellow Christians, that can be taken as a kind of limiting case of the scandal of abuse of power, and the larger scandal of the inversion of the Gospel: if Marco Lombardo's powerful statement to Dante in *Purgatorio* 16 that the chief cause of the world's evil is bad leadership applies anywhere, it applies here.<sup>41</sup> But why should we limit ourselves to this example? Why stop with Boniface? The fact is, all over Italy Christians are making war on fellow Christians, and not without implications for Dante. What happens if we examine the circumstances of Dante's own political situation, taking seriously Guido's disgust at Christians warring against fellow Christians—ironic though it is, given the reasons for his own placement in hell? If we look at exile as the key moment in Dante's story, then we can look both backward and forward from that point to see the ways in which he is implicated in Christians making war on fellow Christians.

The battle of Campaldino, for one example, implicates Dante. The battle, in which Bonconte da Montefeltro was killed in 1289 (as referred to above), is a battle between Florentine Guelfs and Aretine Ghibellines. It is a battle in which Dante is generally assumed, from internal and external evidence, to have taken part as a soldier.<sup>42</sup> That battle, since Dante participated in it directly, can thus stand for all of the battles between Guelf and Ghibelline, and between White and Black, in which, if *Inferno* 10 and the pilgrim's response to Farinata is a guide, Dante was more than eager to play his part. By the time he gets to *Paradiso*, Dante will have learned that political factionalism is not the answer: it is the problem. One

reason for this, as we learn in *Inferno* 27 and can apply retrospectively in *Paradiso* when the pilgrim meets Cacciaguida, is that political factionalism necessarily involves Christians making war on fellow Christians, for reasons of "self, ancestors, and party," to use Farinata's handy anatomy.

Internal and external evidence would also suggest that in the years immediately following his exile, what Dante was chiefly interested in was getting back after exile, pretty much by "any means necessary." His plotting with his fellow White Guelf exiles to bring this about suggests that in his own life he was not immune to the sins of the fox, as Guido understands and practices them. Or to put it another way, this too can be seen as another aspect of Dante's willingness to make war on his fellow Christians. Plotting to come back after exile is most likely what Cacciaguida is referring to when he talks about the time immediately after Dante's exile, and the ruffraff Dante will hang out with:

E quel che più ti graverà le spalle,  
sarà la compagnia malvagia e scempia  
con la qual tu cadrai in questa valle;  
che tutta ingrata, tutta matta ed empia  
si farà contr' a te; ma, poco appresso,  
ella, non tu, n'avrà rossa la tempia.  
Di sua bestialitate il suo processo  
farà la prova; sì ch'a te fia bello  
averti fatta parte per te stesso.

(*Par.* 17.61–69)<sup>43</sup>

Critics have seen at least a loose kind of biographical analogue to the temptations embodied by Ulysses in the early years of Dante's exile in his attraction to philosophy, as exemplified by the writing of the *Convivio*.<sup>44</sup> Dante's desire to come back to Florence, by force if necessary, in these same early years of exile can likewise profitably be seen as the biographical analogue to the temptations embodied by Guido da Montefeltro. The *Convivio* was abandoned for something better. So too was the political intrigue that inevitably leads to violence: in both cases, the proper response to temptation was the writing of the *Commedia*.

If we continue to focus on Boniface as a key figure in the canto, there remain equally interesting avenues to explore. Though logically impossible, Boniface's offer to Guido of absolution in advance is nevertheless extremely interesting theologically. I think it makes sense to look at the

offer not simply as a kind of *ad hoc* move on Boniface's part to get what he wants (although it probably is that as well), but as the logical conclusion to, even a summary of, his entire papal agenda. Dante wants us to see that the blasphemous attempt to forgive sins in advance lies at the end of a route that has been clearly laid out by Boniface himself (and to a certain extent by his predecessors). It is nothing less than a *reductio ad absurdum* of the very claim that Boniface makes with respect to papal power in his famous bull *Unam Sanctam*. Published in 1302, *Unam Sanctam* pushed the claim of earlier popes that they had the right to govern all facets of society to its greatest medieval extent:

Therefore, if the earthly power errs, it shall be judged by the spiritual powers, if a lesser spiritual power errs, it can be judged only by God himself and not by man, as the apostle witnesses, "The spiritual man judgeth all things and he himself is judged by no man" (1 Cor. 2:15). Although this authority was given to a man and is exercised by a man it is not human but rather divine, being given to Peter at God's mouth, and confined to him and to his successors in him, the rock whom the Lord acknowledged when he said to Peter himself "Whatsoever thou shalt bind" etc. (Matt. 16:19). *Whosoever therefore resists this power so ordained by God resists the power of God* unless, like the Manichaeans, he imagines that there are two beginnings, which we judge to be false and heretical, as Moses witnesses, for not "in the beginnings" but "in the beginning" God created heaven and earth (Gen. 1:1). Therefore we declare, state, define and pronounce that it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff [my italics].<sup>45</sup>

Boniface persuades Guido to give him the advice necessary to defeat the Colonna with a promise and a threat. The promise, of course, is that of absolution in advance. The text of *Unam Sanctam* allows us to see that promise from a wider and ultimately very troubling perspective. At the heart of *Unam Sanctam*, Boniface makes the claim that the "whatsoever you bind on earth will be bound also in heaven" clause from Matthew 16, the key Scriptural passage for defining papal power in the Middle Ages, means that the pope has the power to bind anything at all. For Boniface, "whatsoever" comes to mean, for all practical purposes, "everything." If Boniface is right about that, if a pope does have the power to bind anything at all, then why would he not be able to forgive sins in advance? If Boniface takes his own words in *Unam Sanctam* at face value, then who is to say, within the fiction of the poem, that he does not in fact believe his own blasphemous rhetoric? A well-timed absolution in

advance becomes simply another one of those powers, weapons really, like the well-used power of excommunication, that he can convert to his own political ends: the carrot rather than the stick in his papal arsenal. It is all part of the blanket power of that "whatsoever." It takes a devil to bring us back to reality. Since logic (and a devil) shows the absurdity of such a claim, then logic likewise demands that there must also be clearly defined limits to papal power and authority. Dante implies that Boniface's agenda *in toto* does not stop short of absurdity, claiming as it does for the papacy something that is impossible even for God. "Whatsoever" cannot possibly mean "whatever I want," or "anything I want." Matthew's phrase must rather mean "whatever is licit and allowable for a pope to bind on earth will also be bound in heaven." Dante and Boniface are of course very far from agreement about what that might be. In a wonderfully subtle move on the part of the poet, Guido da Montefeltro's recreation of Boniface's offer of absolution imaginatively configures what Dante says in the *Monarchia*, more systematically and in some detail, about the limits of papal power.<sup>46</sup>

If read carefully, the text of *Unam Sanctam* also teaches us to take the "threat" part of Boniface's offer seriously as well. Guido tells us that he finally agreed to do what Boniface has asked him to do because "[a]llor mi pinser li argomenti gravi / là 've 'l tacer mi fu avviso il peggio" (*Inf.* 27.106–7). It is worth pointing out that if Guido is referring only to the "absolution in advance" part of Boniface's argument, then what he says in these lines does not quite make sense. Given the promise of absolution in advance, which Guido clearly accepts, why should he have to be "pushed"—forced—into accepting the offer at all? It is an offer that sounds (and as it turns out really *is*) too good to be true. But in *Unam Sanctam*, the phrase "whosoever resists the power so ordained by God resists the ordinances of God" sounds exactly like the threat needed to complement the promise of absolution in advance and push Guido over the edge. Taken out of their original context and placed within the dialogue of the canto, these lines from *Unam Sanctam* sound as if they might have been scripted by Boniface directly for Guido, in case the carrot part of his offer was not sufficient. Promise Guido the carrot of absolution, but make sure that he knows that he is also being threatened with a very big stick, which a pope has at his disposal when God's ordinances are exactly the same as his own.

There may also be, appropriately, an echo of Paul himself in the offer of absolution that Boniface makes to Guido. Among other claims implied in Boniface's offer is the conspicuously unorthodox assumption that in a case such as this the ends justify the means, that it is perfectly acceptable for one to sin as long as something good comes out of it. Equally troublesome, what Boniface sees as good in this case is only good from the perspective of his own ambition and power, and so the claim that he can forgive Guido in advance is evidence of the extraordinary egotism implied in his willingness to tamper with the truth so blatantly for his own purposes. But there is perhaps also a deliberate echo of St. Paul rippling up to the surface in these lines, in particular an echo of Paul's magisterial discussion of God's ability to bring good out of evil in his letter to the Romans: "What then shall we say? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! For how shall we who are dead to sin still live in it?" (Rom. 6:1–2).<sup>47</sup> In this section of Romans Paul speaks first of God's paradoxical ability to bring good out of evil throughout the history of salvation. Arguing rhetorically with himself, he then asks whether that should encourage us to become greater sinners—to commit more evil so that God would be able to accomplish correspondingly more good: "Shall we sin more so that grace can abound more?" But Paul emphatically answers his own question in the negative: "By no means." Boniface's advice to Guido seems like a parodic and conspicuously un-Pauline reading of Paul's own text: "Shall we sin more?" "Of course." God's plan (and Boniface's) can thereby better be accomplished. Boniface and Guido would both have done well to be better readers of Paul.<sup>48</sup> Paul can be interpreted this way, of course, only by reading the first half of Romans 6 and ignoring the more important concluding second half. For Boniface too, then, "that day he read no further," with its echoes of *Inferno* 5, Augustine's *Confessions*, and most important Augustine's own reading of Paul's Epistle to the Romans. The text of *Unam Sanctam* itself helps to strengthen the case for the presence of this Pauline misreading in *Inferno* 27: Dante seems to be suggesting in *Inferno* 27 that anyone pondering the only slightly submerged implications of *Unam Sanctam* would be hard pressed to find much difference between God's plans and those of its author. Boniface has the audacity to do what he does because God is by definition on his side. The Boniface VIII who dramatically interacts with Guido da Montefeltro in this canto is a Boniface created by Dante, fleshing out a skeleton already provided for him by none other than Boniface himself in *Unam Sanctam*.<sup>49</sup>

In this canto Dante-pilgrim must learn to avoid the temptation to become like Guido that will be posed by his future exile. Learning about Boniface as he is presented in this canto is partly about learning how he must conduct his life in the future. It is also about prophetically denouncing the abuses of the Church, the abuses represented by Boniface. The somewhat dense allusion to Constantine and Pope Sylvester that Guido uses to describe his dilemma is part of that story, a kind of inadvertent history lesson given by Guido to Dante the pilgrim. He tells us that coming to Boniface to cure his fever was not unlike Pope Sylvester coming to cure Constantine of his leprosy:

Ma come Costantin chiese Silvestro  
d'entro Siratti a guerir de la lebbre,  
così mi chiese questi per maestro  
a guerir de la sua superba febbre.  
(*Inf.* 27.92–95)

According to the legend that Dante makes use of here, the Emperor Constantine was miraculously cured of his leprosy through the intervention of Pope Sylvester.<sup>50</sup> Significantly, as in *Inferno* 19, when we find Pope Boniface, the Emperor Constantine is not far behind. In the equation that is made in the text of *Inferno* 27, just as Constantine chose Sylvester, Boniface has chosen Guido. This equation creates an interesting asymmetry, because in the legend of Constantine and Sylvester it is the emperor who calls for help from a pope, and here it is the pope who calls for help, not from an emperor, as strict equivalence would seem to demand, but from a warrior-turned-friar. In its subversion of the original story, it is a clever role-reversal on Dante-poet's part, because Guido gets to play Pope and Boniface gets to play Emperor. Dante may well be implying that the logical result of the Constantinian Church is the "Bonifacian" church, wherein Boniface is in fact more an emperor than a pope.<sup>51</sup>

But how can we best explain the asymmetry of Guido as friar-turned-pope? Again, the answer may come by observing in *Inferno* 19 a similar comparison. In that canto, Dante-pilgrim, standing over the upside-down Pope Nicholas III, is compared to a friar confessing an assassin:

Io stava come 'l frate che confessa  
lo perfido assassìn, che, poi ch'è fitto,  
richiama lui per che la morte cessa.  
(*Inf.* 19.49–51)

It is an apt comparison because Nicholas the pope *is* in fact an assassin, whose victim is the church, whereas Dante the layman, forced to leap into the breach caused by the failure of the church, takes on the role of a friar, a fitting prelude to his prophetic outburst against simony at the end of the canto.<sup>52</sup> In *Inferno* 27, a false friar brings “help” to a pope in the form of clever but assuredly evil advice. Durling and Martinez have noted a direct connection between these two passages, seeing in the figure of Friar Guido a reversal of “Friar” Dante in *Inferno* 19.<sup>53</sup> It needs to be stressed that Guido is indeed a reversal of “Dante-friar” because that reversal helps to explain the asymmetry found in *Inferno* 27 (where it is “friar” rather than “emperor” who helps the pope). The connection between these two passages likewise serves to underscore the difference between false friars and true friars. That distinction, and its implication for Dante, is also what *Inferno* 27 is about at a fundamental level.

It is helpful to examine this legend of the curing of Constantine by Sylvester in some detail. There is an interesting visual version that rather forcefully represents the encounter between Constantine and Sylvester from the papal point of view. If we look at the frescoes of the life of Constantine at Santi Quattro Coronati in Rome, executed in the mid-thirteenth century, we would notice first several panels depicting the story of the curing of Constantine by Sylvester that are the basis for Guido’s comparison in *Inferno* 27.<sup>54</sup> The curing of Constantine’s leprosy brings with it two results, depicted in subsequent panels. The first consequence is Constantine’s conversion. The second is his conferral of temporal power on Sylvester: in what is perhaps the climactic panel of the fresco cycle, a humble and subordinate Constantine presents the symbols of temporal power to Sylvester. Thus the cycle becomes an explanation for and validation of not only the temporal power of the pope but also the subordination of the emperor to the pope, even in matters temporal. These two events, conversion and conferral of temporal power, are of course the two events that Dante himself (Dante-pilgrim) speaks of directly in *Inferno* 19, at the beginning of his apocalyptic invective against a corrupt church: “Ahi, Costantine, di quanto mal fu madre, / non la tua conversion, ma quella dote / che da te prese il primo ricco padre!” (*Inf.* 19.115–117). Constantine’s conversion is certainly a good thing as Dante understands it here. But the conferral of temporal power on the pope is by contrast a very great evil. The fresco cycle thus provides another important linkage between the two cantos, 19 and 27. The story that Guido tells in 27 is



the inevitable outcome of that crucial turning point in the history of the Church that Dante-pilgrim has described earlier in *Inferno* 19. The Santi Quattro Coronati fresco cycle can thus also serve as an explanation for why Dante has a false friar—who, within the comparison generated by his story, metaphorically assumes the seemingly incongruous role of pope—tell the story of the curing of Constantine's leprosy. Dante, subtly and perhaps even cautiously, suggests that just as the story is misused by Guido insofar as he appropriates it as part of his own program of self-justification in hell, so has the story likewise been misused by the papal propaganda machine on earth, insofar as it has been appropriated to justify the temporal power of the papacy.

If papal wealth and power are the problem, what is the solution? We need to take the cameo appearance by Francis of Assisi at the end of *Inferno* 27 seriously in attempting to answer this question. If we do, we will also, paradoxically, find out more about Dante's Pauline journey as well. As false Franciscan, Guido da Montefeltro embodies temptations that Dante must resist. Francis as true friar will become, later in the poem, an important model for Dante to follow as an antidote to these evils. If Boniface is one key figure in understanding the importance of Guido da Montefeltro's career for Dante, Francis is the other. Dante must learn what not to become, from the negative example of Guido. But he must also learn what to become, from positive as well as negative models. Later on he will learn how to become a true Franciscan from Francis himself, who is as good a model for a Franciscan as any. Toward this end, the hagiography of Francis that is told by Thomas Aquinas in canto 11 of *Paradiso* is of the utmost importance for the conversion of the pilgrim. The two most prominent Franciscan virtues, emphasized in that lengthy biography (some eighty lines), are poverty and humility. These are precisely the virtues that Dante himself, by temperament and by circumstances, will need for the long haul. In summary, he will need humility because his besetting sin is pride. He will need poverty because he will have to face the powerlessness of exile.<sup>55</sup> Dante's acceptance of these quintessentially Franciscan virtues has a crucial public dimension to it as well, as an important means for him to articulate the problems created by the Constantinian, which is to say the "Bonifacian," church.

The most important aspect of Francis' life, as narrated by Thomas in *Paradiso* 11 (with the exception of the climactic reception of the stigmata,

to which we will return later) is his marriage to Lady Poverty. The marriage of Francis to Lady Poverty is the key way in which Dante-poet departs from and extends Bonaventure's *Legenda maior* in retelling the life of Francis in *Paradiso* 11. Linking the story of Francis' stripping himself naked in front of his father and the bishop of Assisi to the marriage of Francis to Lady Poverty in this way is one of Dante's own forceful, inventive, and important additions to the tradition of Franciscan hagiography, elevating the marriage to a more prominent place within that tradition and constituting thereby an important contribution even apart from its place in the poem.<sup>56</sup> This marriage between Francis and Lady Poverty presents a rewriting of the Donation of Constantine *in bono*, and Dante goes out of his way to suggest the connection between these events by the way he presents the Donation, not only in *Inferno* 19, but also in the apocalyptic description of the seven *status ecclesiae* at the end of Purgatory, the seven-part history of the tribulations of the Church in *Purgatorio* 32 based on the opening of the seven seals of the apocalypse.<sup>57</sup>

To this understanding of Francis I add one other point: Thomas' description of Francis also includes an emphasis on another of his important virtues, that of peacemaker. Francis as peacemaker is also a pervasive theme in Franciscan hagiography. The well-known story of Francis and the wolf of Gubbio, told in the *Fioretti*, can be read as a peace story, ending as it does with the wolf and the people of Gubbio signing a peace treaty. Other examples of Francis acting as a peacemaker are perhaps not as well known.<sup>58</sup> But there are no fewer than four cities in the Italian peninsula for which Francis notably served in the role of peacemaker during his life: Arezzo, Siena, Bologna, and Assisi itself.<sup>59</sup> And Francis' role as peacemaker extended beyond the Italian peninsula, in a way that is recognized in the *Commedia*. This aspect of Francis' life is certainly present in the text of *Paradiso* 11: his role as a peacemaker is no small part of the extended tradition of Franciscan commentary surrounding Francis' visit to the Sultan, narrated in lines 99–102. Francis' preaching to the Sultan is nothing less than a sign of the peaceable kingdom.<sup>60</sup> Both as an element in Dante's conversion, and as the subject of Dante's prophetic discourse when he has returned from the journey which we call the *Commedia*, it is a subject of the utmost importance. No one has made this point more emphatically than Giuseppe Mazzotta: "[t]hat Dante is a poet of justice hardly needs belaboring. But he is also a peace poet . . ."<sup>61</sup> In summary, all of the important elements of the considerable Franciscan

discourse in the poem have to be seen not simply as virtues that the pilgrim must incorporate into himself, not simply as a blueprint for a generic church reform, but as the specific antidotes to the evils that have been described in the career of the false Franciscan Guido and his interaction with Pope Boniface VIII.<sup>62</sup>

In their edition of the poem, Durling and Martinez have pointed out that a considerable irony emerges from the fact that Pope Nicholas III, unrepentant simoniac, goes to "confession" in *Inferno* 19 to a "friar" in the person of Dante-pilgrim, "for while he was a cardinal, Nicholas had been a special protector of the Friars."<sup>63</sup> The same irony, even though the terms have been reversed, is if anything even more pointed in *Inferno* 27, since in that canto it is Pope Boniface VIII who forces a friar to go to confession to him. A pope in hell makes a false confession to a layman-friar in canto 19. A friar is *in* hell for a false confession made to a pope in canto 27. The irony is if anything more pronounced in the second example, precisely because, very much unlike Nicholas, Boniface VIII was no friend of the Friars.<sup>64</sup> One of the ironies of the story that Guido tells is that for Boniface, as for earlier popes, Friars were of special use. But their earlier role as papal agents of church reform is given a strange and sinister turn here: a friar is of considerable use to pope Boniface, but only because—despite the fact that he took the Franciscan cord "which used to make its wearers leaner, and despite the fact that he lived in Francis' own Assisi after his "conversion,"—Guido was no follower of Francis of Assisi.

All of which brings us back to Paul. *Inferno* 26 and *Inferno* 27: two cantos charged with negative *exempla* for the pilgrim, of roads not to be taken, of warnings against future temptations that he must overcome—each ends by pointing to the actual goals of Dante's journey. Having come there by illegitimate means, Ulysses dies in sight of Mount Purgatory. Dante, emerging from his heavenly-appointed journey through hell, not only reaches Purgatory, but also arduously climbs its seven terraces to learn its lessons. As Hawkins phrases it:

"[t]here can be no doubt that the *Commedia* intends the reader to see Dante's voyage as an explicit correction of the wanderer [Ulysses], as the triumph of pilgrimage over sheer exploitation. In the first canto of the *Purgatorio*, for instance . . . we are told that he came 'in sul lito diserto, / che mai non vide navicar sue acque / omo, che di tornar sia poscia esperto' ('to the desert shore, that never saw any man navigate its waters who afterwards had experience of return', vv.

130–32). The comparison implicit in these lines is unmistakable. Dante lands where Ulysses could not, and returns to tell the tale.”<sup>65</sup>

Guido’s journey to heaven at the end of *Inferno* 27 is interrupted by a devil who leads him down to his rightful place in hell. But Dante’s ascent to heaven in the *Commedia* is not similarly interrupted: he is granted the very vision that was denied Guido—but was granted to Paul. Dante, again in Peter Hawkins’ words, “claims to have seen God face to face, and lives to tell what he can remember of that vision.”<sup>66</sup> Hawkins has other suggestive and pertinent remarks about the importance of Paul to Dante’s vision in *Paradiso*. He reminds us, for example, of the importance of Paul’s journey not simply as the most important analogue to the ending of the *Paradiso*, where Dante presents his own moment of mystical rapture. That same journey is also appropriated in the opening of *Paradiso*, which is in fact also a careful and deliberate rewriting of 2 Corinthians 12 and Paul’s rapture into the “third heaven” of God’s presence. He goes on to say that Dante daringly moves beyond Paul in that “. . . quite unlike St. Paul, he breaks the interdiction of silence that guards the ineffable words” of Paul’s experience.<sup>67</sup> And, in an important endnote, he tells us that even though Paul may have been reticent about describing the actual experience of his rapture, a reticence which contrasts with Dante’s extraordinary boldness, he was by no means similarly reluctant in his other writings to use that experience as a means of justifying his mission: “[t]his oft-noted verse [2 Cor. 12:4], moreover, is part of a larger strategy whereby Paul works first to undo the slander of his rivals in evangelism, and then to establish his own authority with the Corinthians . . . This argument is then followed by a veiled reference to his rapture into the third heaven. However oblique his description to his own experience, . . . he claims this journey *in paradisum* as his own—and as a final warrant for his apostolic witness.”<sup>68</sup> Clearly we are meant to see that Dante’s journey *in paradisum* provides nothing less than the final warrant for the witness of his poem. To these important observations I would suggest that we add the lessons of *Inferno* 27. Dante must return from his Pauline vision and do two quintessentially Pauline things: first, he must stop persecuting his fellow Christians, and second, he must use all his powers to convert them, which is to say in his case, to teach them likewise to cease making war on their fellow Christians. The first will be the fruit of his own conversion; the second will be the fruit of the poem, and its carefully articulated prophetic stance. For both, he has the model of Francis.

Paul became the apostle to the Gentiles, the most important proselytizer in the history of Christianity. But one might be forgiven for thinking that Dante has an even more ambitious and difficult task than Paul. Paul merely had to spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth, turning a small sect within Judaism into a world religion. Dante, on the other hand, has to spread the gospel to his fellow Christians, and Florentine Christians at that, who are too far-gone even to notice that they are in need of conversion. He must spread the gospel to the nominal Christians of his own day, whose sins extend even to making war on their fellow Christians, and to whom the Gospel has already been preached by the likes of Boniface VIII and Guido da Montefeltro.<sup>69</sup> Hawkins suggests, rightly, that like Paul, Dante uses his vision to justify his mission. Once again, however, Dante may be seen to go beyond Paul to the extent that his vision, granted in the final lines of his poem, not only justifies his mission, it generates that mission as well. As the false ways to knowledge and the power that knowledge brings, represented by Ulysses, must be rejected, the false ascent to God that is also an ascent through power and deceit, represented by Guido (and by Boniface), must likewise be rejected. The entire Franciscan discourse of the *Commedia*, seen proleptically in its inverted form in *Inferno* 27, provides important clues as to what a correct ascent might look like, and what kind of help Dante will get to achieve it. It would look like Francis, who soars to God without ever leaving behind the hard realities of "sister bodily death." It would look like the Franciscan poet Jacopone da Todi, who soars to God while enduring the stench of Boniface's prison. It would look like the *Commedia*, whose mystical flights even in the far reaches of Paradise always return to a critique of the corruption of the Church and its leaders. The Francis who in his visit to the Sultan plays the role of peacemaker, preaches Christ, and then returns from this failed attempt at martyrdom and fruitless preaching to preach conversion "al frutto de l'italica erba" (*Par.* 11.105) is the very Francis who can accompany Dante in his mission to preach to the Christians of his own day in that same Italian field. When Dante makes his ascent, he will be able to do so in the company of Francis. Or, to use the iconography that the poem already provides for us in *Inferno* 27, the Francis who comes to take the false Friar Guido to heaven will be there to take the true Friar Dante there instead.

And Francis is someone who knows the territory. Through Thomas Aquinas' retelling, Dante precisely and lovingly depicts Francis' reception

of the stigmata as the culmination of his presentation of Francis' life in *Paradiso* 11, retaining in the description of that event the apocalyptically charged meaning it has in Dante's source, Bonaventure's *Major Life*.<sup>70</sup>

nel crudo sasso intra Tevero e Arno  
da Cristo prese l'ultimo sigillo,  
che le sue membra due anni portarno.  
(*Par.* 11.106–108)

It is appropriate that this event be the centerpiece of Dante's portrayal of Francis, since it was precisely this event which marked out Francis not just as a saint, but as a saint among saints, a saint who has had no equal in the history of Christianity as an *alter Christus*. But there are two important ways in which the sealing event of Francis' reception of the stigmata is of fundamental importance to the present study beyond confirming Dante's approval of the exalted position that the Franciscan hagiographic tradition marked out for Francis.

First, the reception of the stigmata is a singularly important event in the history of mysticism. From this point on, at least within the Franciscan tradition, Francis' reception of the stigmata becomes *the* way to talk about the direct experience of God that is available to humans in this life.<sup>71</sup> It is no accident, for example, that Bonaventure's greatest mystical work (and a work which is of very great importance to the structure of the *Paradiso*), the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, begins as a meditation on the events surrounding Francis' reception of the stigmata. To put it another way, Francis, through his complete identification with Christ crucified, was believed to have achieved nothing less than what Paul himself had earlier achieved through his journey to the third heaven in 2 Corinthians. As Paul was to the moment of the foundation of Christianity, so Francis is to the moment of its renewal.

Second, in this passage from the life of Francis, Dante, following Bonaventure's lead in the *Major Life*, sees Francis' stigmatized body itself as a text to be read, the wounds having literally become seals fixed by God to authenticate that text.<sup>72</sup> Francis' stigmatized body is not only a text in itself, however. It is also a text that glosses another text. For what one reads in the text of the body of Francis is a text that had already been written by Paul: "[e]go enim stigmata in corpore mea porto" ("I bear the marks of Jesus on my body" [Gal. 6:17]).<sup>73</sup> In this way too, Francis has become a postfiguration of Paul.

If Dante, one of the few great religious figures of medieval Christendom who has not been canonized, were finally to receive that accolade, he could stand next to his counterpart Paul, whose icon is the sword, with a gigantic oversized pen. Meanwhile, until that happens, we might want to contemplate an equally interesting omission. In Paradise, (and in the *Commedia* as a whole), Paul is not present. References to him are of course frequent and one could make the case that he is "there" in that he is in the poem as an important part of the allegorical procession at the end of *Purgatorio*. But the figures in that procession are figures in a pageant, allegories that never interact with the pilgrim. Unlike Peter, unlike John, unlike Francis, indeed unlike just about anyone who plays an important role in Christian history, Paul is not present to the pilgrim. Nowhere do we find Paul encountering Dante directly. It is very tempting to think that he is not present because Dante-poet is once again committing an act of terminal daring: finally, by the end of the journey, Dante is not Aeneas. But, thanks to Francis and the tradition that attempts to keep alive the spirit of Francis, he is Paul.

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## NOTES

1. A very preliminary version of this study was first presented at the Medieval and Renaissance Colloquium of the University of Delaware in March, 1999. Many of the ideas that found their way into this version were presented to and modified by the participants of the NEH Dante Seminars for School Teachers that William Stephany and I co-directed in Siena, Italy, during the summers of 2001–2005.

2. Rachel Jacoff and William A. Stephany, "The Poet as Aeneas and Paul," in *Lectura Dantis Americana: Inferno II* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989): 57–72. The notes to these pages are likewise suggestive and illuminating. The authors include as part of their analysis both a systematic review of scholarship dealing with the relationship between Aeneas and Paul, and a discussion of Aeneas and of Paul as models for Dante's own journey. While it would be redundant to repeat their review of scholarship on these issues, several of the key studies that they build on and that I have consulted with profit include: Joseph Anthony Mazzeo, "Dante and the Pauline Modes of Vision," in *Structure and Thought in the Paradiso* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1958): 84–110; Antonino Pagliaro, "Io non Enea, io non Paolo sono," *Il Veltro* I, 1(1957): 7–14. Francesco D'Ovidio ("Dante e San Paolo," *Nuova Antologia*, 4th ser., 151 [1897]: 214–238) makes the case that "it was Paul's own canonical account of his spiritual ecstasy that influenced the *Commedia* in a profound way," rather than the extra-canonical account of the *Visio Pauli* (Jacoff and Stephany, 62). That perception is obviously fundamental to the argument of this study. Another important part of their analysis is that they deal with all of the ambiguities of 2 Corinthians 12, and show how both the patristic tradition and the Dante commentary tradition provide overwhelming evidence that the man Paul speaks of in the text was clearly believed to be Paul himself. For this latter point, the notes on

pp. 112–113 are especially useful. Also important is the analysis of Paul (subsequent to the work of Jacoff and Stephany) in Bernard McGinn's history of Western Christian mysticism, where he discusses the interpretation of this key text and of Pauline theology generally as warrant for the importance of Paul as the "archetypal Christian mystic. McGinn also provides citations from both Augustine and Bonaventure for the belief that Paul was referring to himself in 2 Corinthians 12 (*The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*. Vol. I *The Foundations of Mysticism* [New York: Crossroad, 1991], 69–74).

3. For Aeneas and Paul together, one interesting and important focal point is Cacciaguida's greeting to Dante in canto 15 of *Paradiso* (25–30): "*O sanguis meus, o superinfusa / gratia Dei, sicut tibi cui / bis unquam celi ianuā reclusa?*" Although the question Cacciaguida asks here echoes the greeting of father Anchises to Aeneas in *Aeneid* 6.835, the correct answer to the question is "Paul." Even if the Virgilian echoes are the more insistent, and are therefore likewise the ones that have received most of the critical attention, the language of that greeting thus combines echoes of Aeneas and Paul. Quotations from the text of the *Commedia* are from *The Divine Comedy*, trans. and ed. Charles Singleton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970–75). For a general survey of the place of Paul in the work of Dante, the *Enciclopedia dantesca* is useful. See vol. 4. pp. 271–75 (dir. Umberto Bosco and ed. Giorgio Petrocchi, 6 vols. [Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1970–78]). It will be apparent that the "Paul" we are concerned with here is primarily two "Pauls": the Paul converted on the road to Damascus and the Paul whose journey to heaven described in 2 Corinthians provides the most important biblical model for Dante's own journey. Extensive support for these Pauls, and the crucial connection between them, will be found in subsequent notes. But we will also be taking note of Paul as theologian in other ways as well.

4. One useful recent study of the relationship between the two figurers is Lino Pertile, "Ulisse, Guido, e Le Sirene," *Studi danteschi* 65 (2000): 101–118. Richard Kay ("Two Pairs of Tricks: Ulysses and Guido in Dante's *Inferno* XXVI–XXVII," *Quaderni d'Italianistica* 1 [1980]: 107–24) makes some interesting observations about the relationship between the two cantos. He notes, for example, the fact that both Ulysses and Guido owe their place in hell to a trick that ended in a siege (110); and he makes the important point that very much like Guido, who believes that he can trick his way into heaven, Ulysses' last voyage should also be seen as an attempt to gain salvation by a ruse (113). See also Lawrence Ryan, "Ulysses, Guido, and the Betrayal of Community," *Italica* 54 (1977): 227–49; James Truscott, "Ulysses and Guido (*Inf.* XXVI–XXVII)," *Dante Studies* 91 (1973): 47–72; Harvey Goldstein, "Enea e Paolo: A Reading of the 26th Canto of Dante's *Inferno*," *Symposium* 19 (1965): 316–27. Robert Hollander has pointed out that according to Filippo Villani, writing in the early fifteenth century, Florentines referred to Guido da Montefeltro as a "new Ulysses." See "The Tragedy of Divination in *Inferno* XX" in *Studies in Dante* (Ravenna: Longo, 1980), 142.

5. For further elaboration of this matter, including a discussion of the source of "sameness and difference" as Dante uses it in the Heaven of the sun in Plato's *Timaeus*, see Ronald B. Herzman and Gary W. Towsley, "Squaring the Circle: *Paradiso* 33 and the Poetics of Geometry," *Traditio* 49 (1994): 117–120. See also Ronald Herzman, "From Francis to Solomon: Eschatology in the Sun," in *Dante for the New Millennium*, eds. Teodolinda Barolini and Wayne Storey (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003): 320–333.

6. For a recent response to the controversy, suggesting (usefully, as I see it) that too much debate on the question of the exact name for the sin might take the reader away from more important issues, see Pertile, 104. Truscott, "Ulysses and Guido," 60–2, contains a very good summary of the issue.

7. As has frequently been noted, this passage can be seen in palindomic relationship to Dante's earlier treatment of Guido da Montefeltro in *Convivio* 4.28.8, who is presented there as an exemplum of the virtues of old age. The image of life as a sea voyage is present in that earlier version.

8. A connection between Trojan Horse and Sicilian Bull has been noted by Giuseppe Mazzotta, among others. See "The Light of Venus and the Poetry of Dante," in *Magister Regis: Studies in Honor of Robert Earl Kaske*, eds. Arthur Groos et. al. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986), 160. This essay, which has also been reprinted in other collections, forms the basis for chapter 3, "The Light of Venus," in *Dante's Vision and the Circle of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).



9.

Come 'l bue cicilian che mugghiò prima  
col pianto di colui, e ciò fu dritto,  
che l'avea temperato con sua lima,  
mugghiava con la voce de l'afflitto,  
sì che, con tutto che fosse di rame,  
pur el pareva dal dolor trafitto;  
così, per non aver via né forame  
dal principio nel foco, in suo linguaggio  
si convertian le parole grame.

(*Inf.* 27. 7–15)

The thematic connections between the Sicilian Bull and the sins of Guido are well discussed by Richard Lansing, "Submerged Meanings in Dante's Similes (*Inf.* XXVII)," *Dante Studies* 94 (1976): 62–65.

10. Quotations from the *Aeneid* are from *P. Vergili Maronis Opera*, ed. R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969). The English translation is by Allen Mandelbaum, *The Aeneid of Virgil* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), *passim*.

11. Boniface's multiple appearances in hell are described by Joan Ferrante in *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984). See esp. 76 and ff. She captures it nicely in the following: "It is a curious irony, and one that must have appealed to Dante, that Boniface is a presence throughout the *Comedy*, although he cannot actually appear in it because, according to the fiction, he is still alive, just as he was a constant presence in the hearings held against him [by his archenemy Philip IV], although he could not appear in them because he was already dead" (83).

12. "... così insieme / a la vendetta vanno come a l'ira" (*Inf.* 26.56–7).

13. One might also add Cavalcante in *Inferno* 10. He is not silent. But he is silent with respect to his tomb-mate Farinata, and the two are clearly hostile to each other.

14. For an analysis of the structure of the canto, see Sara Sturm, "Structure and Meaning in *Inferno* 26," *Dante Studies* 92 (1974): 93–106.

15. The argument that Dante's Ulysses is a combination of Homeric surface and Virgilian substance is advanced by Peter Kalkavage in "Dante and Ulysses: A Reading of *Inferno* XXVI," *The St. John's Review* Vol. 40, no. 3 (1991): 1–8. This essay, while recognizing that Dante did not know Homer directly, makes the case for the importance of Homer's Odysseus to the *Commedia*.

16. On the issue of Guido's repentance, see Joseph Markulin, "Dante's Guido da Montefeltro: A Reconsideration," *Dante Studies* 100 (1982): 25–40.

17. That Ulysses disguises himself as Aeneas, but without Aeneas' *pietas*, has been noted by Giuseppe Mazzotta. See his "Ulysses: Persuasion versus Prophecy," in *Lectura Dantis Inferno: A Canto-by-Canto Commentary*, eds. Allen Mandelbaum, Anthony Oldcorn, and Charles Ross (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), 351.

18. Though this is certainly less ironic than the fact that a poet named Virgil and his fictional character Aeneas are accorded the same status and the same degree of reality here and in the fiction of the poem as a whole.

19. David Thompson examines the contrast between Ulysses and Aeneas in terms of their journeys in *Dante's Epic Journeys* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974). Mazzotta has provided a useful bibliography for this and related aspects of Ulysses in *Dante, Poet of the Desert* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 50.

20. The full text of the speech leading up these words is as follows:

"O socii (neque enim ignari sumus ante malorum),  
o passi graviores, dabit deus his quoque finem.  
Vos et Scyllaeam rabiem penitusque sonantis  
accestis scopulos, vos et Cyclopa saxa  
experti: revocate animos maestumque timorem

mittite; forsan et haec olim meminisse iuvabit.  
Per varios casus, per tot discrimina rerum  
tendimus in Latium, sedes ubi fata quietas  
ostendunt; illic fas regna resurgere Troiae.  
Durate et vosmet rebus servate secundis.”

(1.198–207)

The many rhetorical similarities between Aeneas and Ulysses would repay careful analysis.

21. Francesco De Sanctis’ famous nineteenth-century tribute to Ulysses as a harbinger of the “Age of Discovery” offers among other things both a tribute to the power of Dante’s language and an important reminder to the reader of just how powerful the temptations embodied by Ulysses are: “We seem to be taking part in a voyage of Columbus: sin becomes virtue . . . Dante the poet raises a statue to this forerunner of Columbus, who stretches wide his arms to new seas and new worlds” (*History of Italian Literature*, trans. Joan Redfern [New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1931], vol. 1, 208, as quoted in Peter Hawkins, *Dante’s Testaments*, 339). Hawkins points out that ever since De Sanctis, this romantic and positive reading of Ulysses has been *de rigueur* “among Italian critics of a certain stripe” (ibid.). Writing in 1981, Anthony Cassell notes that “In retrospect, it seems almost incredible that the views held by De Sanctis and Fubini—that of a noble, tragic Ulysses . . . should ever have held sway for so long” (“The Lesson of Ulysses,” *Dante Studies* 99 [1981]: 113). His note to this observation gives extended bibliographical citations for the tradition.

22. The phrase “lightning rod” and important extended analysis surrounding it belong to Teodolinda Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 52. The full quotation reads “Ulysses is the lightning rod Dante places in the poem to attract and defuse his own consciousness of the presumption involved in anointing oneself God’s scribe. In other words, Ulysses documents Dante’s self-awareness: Dante *knows* that, in constructing a poem whose fiction is that it is not fictional, he has given himself a license to write the world, to play God unchecked.” Peter Hawkins sees Ulysses as a key player, if not the key player, in his extended discussion of Dante’s Pride in *Dante’s Testaments*.

23. The Jerome Biblical Commentary suggests that there is a kind of literari-ness in Acts of the Apostles such that it may have drawn on classical sources for its account of its many shipwrecks.

24. It is hardly surprising that the most important conversion in Christian history should play a key role in the most important conversion poem in Christian history. But since in this study I am elevating this story to a place more or less equal to that of Paul’s journey to the third heaven in 2 Corinthians, it is worth pointing out that the conversion of Paul is not simply a magisterial scriptural text known and understood by Dante in a general way, however central. It is a text that is referred to with great specificity elsewhere within the *Commedia* itself. As Giuseppe Di Scipio has shown, Dante’s final purification toward the end of *Paradiso* makes specific and explicit references to the text of Paul on the road to Damascus. Di Scipio further links the conversion of Paul with Pauline modes of vision in other parts of the poem. See his “Dante and St. Paul: The Blinding Light and Water,” *Dante Studies* 98(1980): 151–57. It is of course also worth reminding ourselves that these two texts are closely connected in terms of Paul’s mysticism, the vision on the road to Damascus being seen as perhaps only slightly less important in the history of the Christian mystical tradition than 2 Corinthians. On the connection between these two Pauline texts, see McGinn, *Foundations of Mysticism*, 70–74. It may also be worth pointing out that these accounts of Paul’s conversion show that, like Moses, David, and Solomon in the Old Testament, Paul is both an author of and a character within scripture. While it might be too much to speak of Paul Poet and Saul / Paul Pilgrim, these two Pauls fit nicely with the identification between Dante and Paul that is the subject of this section of the essay.

25. For historical background and speculations on the historicity of Boniface’s offer, see Agnello Baldi, “Un Francescano all’*Inferno* (Guido da Montefeltro),” in *Dante e il francescanesimo*, ed. Attilio Mellone, O.F.M. (Cava dei Tirreni: Avagliano Editore, 1987), 134.

26. A similar line is taken by Joseph Markulin, who is interested in the way in which Guido tries to project his own interests in his speech to Dante (“Guido da Montefeltro: A Reconsideration,” *Dante Studies* 100 [1982]: 25–40).

27. For a discussion of this episode, see Ronald B. Herzman, "Cannibalism and Communion in *Inferno* 33," *Dante Studies* 98 (1980): 69–71.

28. Presumption as a theological condition is a distortion of the virtue of hope, in Thomistic / Aristotelian terms the excess of the virtue, just as despair is its defect. The actual definition of hope given by Dante-pilgrim in *Paradiso* 25 during his examination by St. James contains a stunning verbal echo of Guido's presumptuous advice to Boniface VIII in *Inferno* 27. Guido tells Boniface that "lunga promessa con l'attender corto / ti farà trionfar ne l'alto seggio" (*Inf.* 27.110–11). In *Paradiso*, hope, according to Dante (and Catholic doctrine), is "uno attender certo / de la gloria futura" (*Par.* 25.67–8). The change from presumption to hope, from *Inferno* to *Paradiso*, is accomplished by the change of a single letter. I am grateful to William Stephany for our co-discovery of this textual connection. Truscott, "Ulysses and Guido," points out that Guido is guilty of presumption "of a kind precisely defined by St. Thomas" (61), though he sees it as a defining feature of Guido's entire career rather than as applying specifically to the acceptance of the bogus offer of Boniface of absolution in advance. Guido's presumption and its relation to the virtue of hope and to *Par.* 25 are treated extensively by Alison Cornish in "The Epistle of James in *Inferno* 26," *Traditio* 45 (1989–90): 356–79. Cornish demonstrates that Guido's presumption is defined in the text of the Epistle of James. She quotes the definition of hope from *Par.* 25 without however noticing its textual affiliation with *Inf.* 27. See, also, Richard Bates and Thomas Rendall, "Dante's Ulysses and the Epistle of James," *Dante Studies* 107 (1989): 33–44.

29. For insightful discussions with me *in situ*, I am again grateful to William Stephany. For an argument that Dante knew the Assisi Frescoes, see Ronald B. Herzman, "'I speak not yet of proof': Dante and the Art of Assisi," in *The Art of the Franciscan Order in Italy*, ed. William R. Cook (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2005), 189–209.

30. The full text of this passage from the *Legenda Maior* is as follows: "First endowed with the spirit of divine grace, / he was then enriched / by the merit of unshakeable virtue; and filled with the spirit of prophecy, / he was also assigned an angelic ministry / and was totally inflamed with seraphic fire. / Like a hierarchic man / lifted up in a fiery chariot, it may be reasonably accepted as true / that he came in the spirit and power of Elijah, / as will appear quite clearly in the course of his life" (*The Major Legend of Saint Francis*, in Regis J. Armstrong, Wayne Hellmann, and William Short, eds., *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents. Vol. 2: The Founder* [New York: New City Press, 2000], 526–27). This quotation is merely the first in a series of carefully placed references to Elijah throughout the *Legenda Maior*. For a discussion of Elijah as part of the typological pattern of the *Legenda Maior*, see Richard K. Emmerson and Ronald B. Herzman, *The Apocalyptic Imagination in Medieval Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), chapter 2, "Bonaventure's Apocalyptic Francis," 36–75.

31. Giuseppe Mazzotta has pointed out various connections between Francis and Pentecost in his discussion of *Inferno* 27 in *Dante's Vision and the Circle of Knowledge*. "The tongues of fire are usually explained as a parody of the Pentecostal gift of prophecy that descended on the apostles at the time of the origin of the church. It happened however that the Constitution of the Franciscans established that the Friars should convene at the Porziuncula every four years at Pentecost. The reason for this ritual is to be found in the Franciscans' conscious vision of themselves as the new apostles, capable of reforming the world" (70). The theme of Friars as new apostles can be seen throughout the foundational documents of the Franciscan movement. See for example Thomas of Celano's *Vita Prima*, 9.22. And that part of the Franciscan mission—preaching the gospel throughout the world—can be seen later in the *Commedia* itself, since the life of Francis that is narrated by Thomas Aquinas in *Paradiso* 11 conspicuously includes Francis' journey to the Sultan and his attempt to preach the gospel before the Sultan and his court. Penn Szitya has treated the connection between Franciscan preaching and Pentecost in detail in *The Antifraternal Tradition in Medieval Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986). See also Emmerson and Herzman, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, chap. 2.

32. Mazzotta makes the same point: "More substantively, the tongues of fire in which the sinners are wrapped are an emblem more appropriate to a Franciscan like Guido than to Ulysses" (*Dante's Vision*, 70). See also Glending Olsen, "*Inferno* 27 and the Perversions of Pentecost," *Dante Studies*

117 (1999): 21–33. Olson's analysis, treating parallels between Guido and Boniface and the early church, is complementary to the one argued here: "I would argue that in a similar parodic strain Boniface VIII and Guido da Montefeltro play out a perverted version of the early church on the day of Pentecost: the gift of tongues is transformed into drunken words reflecting the inebriation of pride, not the gifts of the Spirit . . ." (27).

33. A point that strengthens the case Mazzotta makes that it is logical argument itself that comes under judgment in this canto. Mazzotta demonstrates that in *Inferno* 27 logic is divorced from ethical considerations and that Dante-poet is thereby mapping a serious epistemological concern that goes beyond the canto and the poem. That logic can be so used—not simply by the devil but more importantly by Guido himself, who is "portrayed as if he were a logician," according to Mazzotta (*Dante's Vision*, 70)—show both its limitations and its dangers as a form of knowing. "Appropriately," Mazzotta puts it, "Guido, who has betrayed his Franciscan principles, is now claimed by one of the very logicians the Franciscans opposed" (70). If logic can be used without regard to ethical considerations, then it will be used selectively when it helps one's own case and ignored when it doesn't. It is used by the devil to make the case for the damnation of Guido in *Inferno* and ignored when it would support the case for the salvation of Bonconte in *Purgatorio*. Or, to look at it from another perspective, again using *Purgatorio* 5 by way of contrast, just as logic misused helps damn Guido, Bonconte is saved by an act that goes beyond logic, and from a limited infernal perspective seems to defy logic. Mazzotta argues his position again in "Dante's Franciscanism," in *Dante and the Franciscans*, ed. Santa Casciani (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2006), 171–98. Another useful study that deals with the relationship between Franciscan spirituality and false logic in these cantos is Santa Casciani, "Reason, Deception, and Franciscan Spirituality in *Inferno* 26 and 27," *Quaderni d'Italianistica* 22 (2001): 37–55.

34. Jacoff and Stephany, 64.

35. Durling and Martinez, 572.

36. As noted above, *The Undivine Comedy*, 52.

37. The point that I am trying to make is not that the concerns of *Inferno* 27 have been overlooked in the critical tradition. Rather, the emphasis in *Inferno* 26 on Ulysses' treachery as it speaks directly to the concerns of Dante the pilgrim has not been matched by a similar insistence in dealing with the treachery of Guido in *Inferno* 27. See, for example, Cornish, "Epistle of St. James, 367: 'Guido da Montefeltro, a relatively pedestrian brand of con artist and a near contemporary of Dante's, is dwarfed by his juxtaposition with the great hero of Antiquity, Ulysses, whose epic adventures beyond the known world tends to trivialize any of his particular fraudulent acts enumerated by Dante's guide Virgil.'" Cornish's own analysis in this article is an attempt to provide a corrective for the presumed discrepancy between the two figures by focusing on the equality of their sins. A similar point about the equality of the two figures is made by Mazzotta: ". . . degrees of style are illusory values, and Ulysses and Guido, for all their stylistic differences, are damned to the same punishment . . ." ("Dante's Franciscanism," 173).

38. *Dante's Testaments*, 283.

39. "Life of Dante," in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 8. To flesh out this part of Dante's life, and for a well-told version of what we know of the facts of Dante's life and their relationship to his works, see the more extended account in Giorgio Petrocchi, *Vita di Dante* (Rome: Laterza, 1983), especially chap. 9, "Dal Priorato alla condanna: Le vicende d'uno sconfitto," 77–90. See also Robert Hollander, *Dante: A Life in Works* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), for a somewhat similar and equally useful account.

40. Mazzotta, *Dante's Vision*, goes so far as to see exile as providing the epistemological basis for the poem. See chap. 9, "Theology and Exile," 174–96.

41. Ben puoi veder che la mala condotta

è la cagion che 'l mondo ha fatto reo,

e non natura che 'n voi sia corrotta

(*Purg.* 16.103–05).

Marco's entire discourse to Dante in this canto is of course supremely relevant to the issues of *Inferno* 27, moving as it does into one of the poem's most important direct discussions of the relationship between secular and ecclesiastical authority. It is also another place in the poem, not coincidentally, where Boniface VIII comes under direct attack.

42. Petrocchi, for one, takes it as certain that Dante took part in the battle of Campaldino, and provides a good summary of the evidence for this certitude, internal and external. Important for our purposes because it links Buonconte with his father Guido from yet another perspective in the poem, Petrocchi's explanation points out that the geography of the battle as Dante describes it clearly comes from inside information. I quote the first part of his discussion, but the subsequent two pages are also useful: "Certissima e invece, come accennavamo, la presenza di Dante alla battaglia di Campaldino (11 giugno) e alla sortita di Caprona (16 agosto). Almeno io la dò per certa, tanto i due episodi, più importante il primo, più evidente il secondo, sono strettamente assimilabili alle cose viste dal poeta, viste e sentite come l'alta pagina della morte di Bonconte da Montefeltro, frutto di una scenario ben noto a lui: la topografia del campo di battaglia, l'infittirsi delle nubi e infine lo spaventevole esploderò dell'uragano. Tuttavia la lezione è autentica, e risuona dalla traduzione (e da ritenere fidelissima) che il Bruni resi d'un epistola perduta . . ." (*Vita di Dante*, 26). Petrocchi then goes on to quote Bruni, mixing selections from Bruni's *Life of Dante* with his own analysis. Equally important for our purposes, Dante certainly wants to make it sound as though he has taken part in this battle as the poem's first person apostrophe to the Aretines as the beginning of *Inferno* 22 forces us (within the movement of the poem) to conclude. Even in the absence of the convincing external evidence provided by Petrocchi, I would have been inclined to make exactly the same case for Dante as a soldier: his poetic (as well as real) participation in this battle has put him in the position of a Christian making war on his fellow Christians.

43. Musa's convenient gloss to these lines reads: "After the exile in 1302, they [the White Guelfs] made several attempts to march on Florence. Dante did not participate in the last attempt in 1304, and about this time he broke from the party" (*The Divine Comedy Vol. III: Paradiso*, trans. Mark Musa [New York: Penguin Books, 1984], 209).

44. See, for example, the analysis of John Freccero in *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*, ed. Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 146: "As Bruno Nardi once suggested, it implies a retrospective view of Dante himself both as poet and as man, when with confidence ("ingegno") he embarked upon the writing of the *Convivio*, a work never completed. . . . Ulysses would then stand for a moment in the pilgrim's life . . . for the disastrous prelude to the preparation for grace, a misleading guide before the encounter with Virgil." See also Hawkins, *Dante's Testaments*, 273–74. Thus in this reading Dante's "rejection" of the *Convivio*, in the sense that the work is abandoned and left incomplete, parallels his abandonment of philosophy (as represented by the temptations of Ulysses) as his road to salvation. One must of course use caution in the application of this reading: it becomes easy to confuse the *Convivio* as it is used for palinodic purposes within the retrospective structure of the *Commedia* with the complexity and density of the "real" *Convivio* as it actually exists. It is certainly possible to find in the *Convivio* instances where Dante flat out changes his mind when he comes to treat the same material in the *Commedia*, and his discussion of Guido da Montefeltro in the two texts is a significant example of such an about face. But of course there are many other places in the *Convivio* where the text provides a useful gloss for the *Commedia* in altogether different, more positive ways. This palinodic reading is only one sense among many in which we can look at the *Convivio* as a kind of "necessary detour" for Dante. The lively debate over the palinodic status of the *Convivio* is well summarized by Robert Hollander, *Dante: A Life in Works*, 81–90, 192–94. Hollander states: "The point of this assemblage of evidence is not to see how often in the *Comedy* Dante is in polemic with his own previous work, only that he sometimes is. [ . . . ] the later poem at times tackles the task of clearing the record of errors in *Convivio*. And it is clear that some of these are not trivial" (90).

45. Quoted in Brian Tierney, ed. and trans., *The Crisis of Church and State 1050–1300* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1964), 132–33. Tierney's collection of primary sources and documents in this volume remains authoritative for the background leading up to Boniface's claims. For a more succinct account, see William R. Cook and Ronald B. Herzman, *The Medieval World View*. 2nd ed. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), chap. 8, "Church, State, and Society," 208–211.

46. For the *Monarchia*, see especially Book III, and the more specific discussion of the text of Matthew 16:18 in III.viii. The example that Dante uses to show the limitation of papal authority is

exactly that of *Inferno* 27: "He could absolve me without my having repented, which even God cannot do." Prue Shaw, ed., *Monarchy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 76–77.

47. Quid ergo dicemus? permanebimus in peccato ut gratia abundet? Absit. Qui enim mortui sumus peccato, quomodo adhuc vivemus in illo.

48. I am indebted to Erik Johnson for first pointing out a possible connection between Boniface and Paul in this passage.

49. Autocitation as self-incrimination in the *Inferno* is by no means limited to Boniface VIII. William Stephany, for example, has carefully collected and analyzed textual evidence to show that Pier della Vigna speaks his own words (words that come both from his own rhetorical treatises and from the encomia he wrote in praise of Frederick II) to similarly condemn himself in *Inferno* 13. Stephany makes a strong case for the fact that Pier—both in himself and through his writings—would have been much better known in Dante's day than in ours, and so at least some of Dante's audience would surely have been able to see there the ironic force of Dante's condemnation. It seems to me that if this is true for Pier, and I believe that it clearly is, it is *a fortiori* true of someone as well known as Boniface VIII. In these matters, as in others, I believe that we are more likely to underread Dante than to overread him. See William A. Stephany, "Pier della Vigna's Self-Fulfilling Prophecies: The 'Eulogy' of Frederick II and *Inferno* 13," *Traditio* 38 (1982): 193–212.

50. For a succinct account of the story, and its linkage with the Donation of Constantine, see the notes to Durling / Martinez, 302. For a more extended account, see the life of St. Sylvester in the *Golden Legend* (Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. William Granger Ryan [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993], vol. 1, 62–71).

51. See Lansing, "Submerged Similes," 65–68, for a complementary analysis of this simile. Lansing aptly talks about "the displacement of a parallel between a pope and another pope . . . to one between a pope and an emperor" in his discussion (66).

52. For a discussion of this prophetic outburst within the structure of the canto, see Ronald B. Herzman and William A. Stephany, "'O miseri seguaci': Sacramental Inversion in *Inferno* 19," *Dante Studies* 96 (1978): 39–65.

53. See the notes of Durling / Martinez to both cantos, p. 298 for canto 19 and p. 428 for 27.

54. Once again this raises the fascinating question of what art Dante did and did not see. Although the source of the fresco cycle is clearly a reworking of the account in the *Golden Legend*, there is nothing in the written account that conveys the political subordination of the empire to the papacy in the manner depicted in the frescoes. On the contrary, we are told that "just as the Roman emperor was supreme in the world, so the bishop of Rome would be head of all bishops," a statement that comes much closer to Dante's view of things, as expressed for example in the *Monarchy* (*Golden Legend*, 65).

55. For a more extended treatment of the Franciscan virtues of poverty and humility as the necessary virtues for Dante to take with him into exile, see Ronald B. Herzman, "Dante and the Apocalypse," in *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, eds. Richard K. Emmerson and Bernard McGinn (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 405 and ff. Hawkins, *Dante's Testaments*, presents a thoughtful treatment of Dante's pride as one of the unifying concerns of the poem.

56. The connection was first noted by Auerbach in "Saint Francis of Assisi in Dante's *Commedia*," *Italica* 22 (1945): 166–79.

57. Seeing the connection between Francis and the Donation of Constantine depends on sources within the Franciscan tradition, several intertextual links in the *Commedia*, and studies that have been written about these key moments in the poem. In *Paradiso* 11, Dante takes the famous episode from Bonaventure's *Major Life* (also famously depicted in the Assisi frescoes) wherein Francis, the cloth merchant's son, strips himself naked before the bishop of Assisi and returns all his worldly goods to his father and adds to this already dramatic scene material from another important tradition in Franciscan hagiography, the marriage of Francis to Lady Poverty (*Par.* 11.58–63). This mystical marriage is implied, though not actually stated, in an early Franciscan document called the *Sacrum Commercium*, though a more important source for Dante may well be the fresco depicting this marriage on the ceiling of the lower church of the Basilica in Assisi. For this connection, see Herzman, "Dante and the Art of Assisi," 192–199. For the importance of the *Sacrum Commercium* to Dante, see Nick

Havely, *Dante and the Franciscans* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004), 89–93. The *Sacrum commercium* treats the Donation of Constantine in much the same way that Dante does. Thus Dante merges the language of marriage and the language of poverty in *Paradiso* 11, even as through inversion he merges the language of marriage and the language of wealth in *Inferno* 19. In *Inferno* 19, the Donation of Constantine—the point at which the church “officially” becomes wealthy—is presented as a dowry, suggesting that from that time on, the pope is implicitly married to another bride in addition to the church: wealth (*Inf.* 19.115–17). Thus a dowry has in a sense become more important to the popes than the church itself, a kind of false or surrogate bride for the vicars of Christ. But the Donation of Constantine finds another important explicit moment in the poem as well. In Dante’s Purgatorial unfolding of Church history, the Donation of Constantine is presented as the third *status ecclesiae* in the list of tribulations suffered by the Church in the history of seven beginning with the Incarnation and moving to the Last Judgment. This in turn suggests that the stripping of Francis / marriage of Francis to Lady Poverty can be read as a rewriting *in bono* of the apocalyptically charged Donation of Constantine. The poverty of Francis becomes a solution, or at least the blueprint for a solution, to the problem created by papal wealth and power. Boniface represents the Constantinian moment carried to its furthest extreme. Francis represents the possibility of undoing, or at the very least resisting, that moment and its consequences. It is no accident that Boniface and Francis are both characters in *Inferno* 27. This set of intertextual affiliations, which draws together *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*, and shows how they are all implicitly shaped by a Franciscan vision, has been argued at greater length in Herzman, “From Francis to Solomon.” This study draws in turn on the earlier exegetical work of Robert Kaske and others.

58. “When he finished the sermon, Saint Francis said, ‘Listen, my brothers! Brother Wolf, who is here before you, has promised me, and given me his guarantee, to make peace with you, and never offend you in anything, if you promise to give him every day the things that he needs. And I make myself trustee for him that he will firmly observe this peace pact.’ [ . . . ] ‘And you, Brother Wolf, do you promise to observe the peace pact with these people, that you will not harm the people, the animals, nor any creature?’” (*The Little Flowers of Saint Francis*, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. 3: *The Prophet*, eds. Regis Armstrong, Wayne Hellmann, and William Short. [New York: New City Press, 2001], 603.) The best date for the *Fioretti* (themselves based on the earlier Latin *Deeds of Blessed Francis*) is sometime after 1337, thus placing the collection after Dante’s lifetime. But the stories in this collection were certainly circulated earlier. For the date and the composition of the *Fioretti*, see the “Introduction” to the *Deeds of Blessed Francis* and the *Fioretti* in this volume, 429–434.

59. These instances have been collected and documented by William R. Cook, “Beatus Pacificus: Francis of Assisi as Peacemaker,” *The Cord* 33 (1983): 130–36. See also Cook’s analysis of Francis as peacemaker in *Francis of Assisi: The Way of Poverty and Humility* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1989), 63: “Peace for Francis involved not only bringing *people* into harmony, but all of creation.” One could profitably substitute Dante’s name for Francis’ as a description of the Heaven of the Sun and indeed of the entire Comedy. Restoring the harmony of creation as a major theme in Franciscan poetry has been argued by Alessandro Vettori in *Poets of Divine Love: Franciscan Mystical Poetry of the Thirteenth Century* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004).

60. This point has been argued extensively in Herzman, “From Francis to Solomon,” 7 and ff. The main lines of the argument are based on a contextualized study of the earlier rule for the order, the rule of 1221, *Regula non bullata* 16, “Those Going Among the Saracens and Other Non-believers,” which discusses the ways that Friars “are not to engage in arguments or disputes, but to be subject to every human creature for God’s sake . . .” (*Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, vol. 1: *The Saint*, eds. Regis Armstrong, Wayne Hellman, and William Short [New York: New City Press, 1999], 74). One of the seven tribulations of the church depicted in *Purgatorio* 32 is most frequently interpreted as the coming of Islam. Just as Francis’ marriage to Lady Poverty is a rewriting of the Donation of Constantine, so also is Francis’ visit to the Sultan a rewriting of the Coming of Islam. Poverty answers wealth; peace answers war. Michael F. Cusato has recently proposed that there are profound connections between Francis’ encounter with the Sultan and his reception of the stigmata on Mount La Verna. Those connections are certainly not without implications for Dante and the way that the stigmatization of Francis is incorporated into the *Commedia*. See “Of Snakes and Angels: The Mystical

Experience Behind the Stigmatization Narrative of Il Celano,” in Jacques Dalarun, Michael F. Cusato, Carla Salvati, *The Stigmata of Francis of Assisi: New Studies, New Perspectives* (St. Bonaventure, New York: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2006), 29–74. For a bibliography of recent work on the account of Francis’ meeting with the Sultan, see p. 61 n. 69.

61. Mazzotta goes on to link Dante to the tradition of Isaiah and the Gospels, and to flesh out his point he writes movingly of Dante in the context of his meeting with Cacciaguida in the Circle of Mars: “As he exposes and denounces all forms of violence—the violence of political interests, of desire, history, and even the violence involved in hermeneutical projects such as his own—Dante keeps his sight fixed on the hope for peace” (*Dante’s Vision*, 315–16). Mazzotta continues his analysis of the *Commedia* as a “peace poem” by examining other cantos of the poem in subsequent pages. Although in *Dante’s Vision* and in other works Mazzotta is an acute and perceptive reader of Franciscan elements in the *Commedia*, granting them an importance and depth that few other critics have seen, he does not include an analysis of them at this point in his discussion of Dante as a peace poet.

62. It is well to keep in mind an important aspect of the mendicant discourse in the Heaven of the Sun. Not only do Thomas and Dominic praise the founders of each other’s order, but they lament the degeneracy of their own. In a retrospective reading of the poem, *Inferno* 27 provides very specific evidence of what this degeneracy looks like, and what it implies for Dante and his world.

63. Durling / Martinez, 298. And not simply as cardinal: on Nicholas’ relationship to the Friars after assuming the papacy, David Burr writes: “In May 1279, Pope Nicholas III asked the Franciscan general chapter at Assisi *what he could do for the order*. The result was *Exiit qui seminat*, promulgated in August of that year” (*The Spiritual Franciscans* [University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001], 55). (Italics mine.)

64. On Boniface’s negative (though admittedly complicated) relation to the Friars, see Burr, *Spiritual Franciscans*, passim. A passage from Burr that fits extremely well with the portrait of Boniface presented in this reading of *Inferno* 27 shows the pope’s obsession with control, not only over dissident groups, but over potential dissident groups, thus implying from a different but complementary perspective that Boniface is someone who sees his own authority and power to be essentially without limits: “Boniface’s reaction [to unauthorized religious groups] was predictable. He called for surveillance—not only of the genuinely rebellious groups, but also of all whose freedom from direct control might possibly hide rebellion. The magnitude of this task becomes touchingly apparent when in one letter he orders his subordinates to take a good look at hermits. One can imagine those subordinates trudging through the mountains conducting their eremitical census. Even Boniface must have seen the limitations of this approach” (72). Whether or not the historical Boniface would in fact have seen the limitations of this approach, it is clear that the Infernal Boniface depicted by Dante would not have. But readers of *Inferno* certainly can.

65. *Dante’s Testaments*, 274.

66. Ibid. Hawkins’ analysis then moves directly from Ulysses to Paul, seeing in Paul another antithesis to the aborted journey of Ulysses. This is certainly true and certainly important. But it is also interesting that this prompt never gets Hawkins to look carefully at what is going on in the complementary canto: he does not notice that this antithesis is likewise related to Guido and his interrupted journey. He does not notice that Guido even has an interrupted journey, a journey that in its very mechanics much more clearly parodies the ascent of Paul than does the journey of Ulysses. This is to take nothing away from the richness of Hawkins’ analysis: *Dante’s Testaments* opens up the figure of Ulysses in many significant ways. It does add to the richness of Dante.

67. Ibid., 275.

68. Ibid., 305.

69. Dante attacks this issue directly both in *Paradiso* 19 in his discussion of the judgment that nominal Christians will receive, and in *Paradiso* 27 in the more specific attack on church corruption. Note the figural connection to *Inferno* 19 and *Inferno* 27.

70. McGinn, *Flowering of Mysticism*, makes the important observation that not just the authorized life by Bonaventure, but all the accounts of Francis’ life stress that the reception of the stigmata by Francis as “the culminating seal on his holiness” (59). For Dante’s appreciation and appropriation of



the apocalyptic significance of Francis' stigmatization see Herzman, "Dante and the Apocalypse," 406.

71. As McGinn has put it, Francis' reception of the stigmata "became *the* sign to his followers that he had achieved the status of the highest angels through transforming love—Francis, as Bonaventure later described him, was truly *vir angelicus*. This 'new and amazing miracle,' which can also be described as a new form of mystical union, assured *Il Poverello* an important role in subsequent Christian mysticism" (*Flowering of Mysticism*, 63–64). McGinn goes on to describe ways in which this mystical event became nothing less than a wellspring for a subsequent powerful tradition of Franciscan mysticism.

72. Dante refers to the stigmatization of Francis as the "final seal" ("l'ultimo sigillo") because he has referred previously to two other sealings of great importance in the story of Francis' life and the development of the Franciscan order: the papal sealings on the documents which give approval and official status to the order. Popes Innocent III and Honorius III provide the first and second seals on the texts of these documents, first the primitive rule of 1209, and then the official rule for the order, appropriately named the *Regula Bullata*, in 1223. God provides the seal on the third, final, and most important document, Francis' body. Thus the text puns on the red wax seals authenticating the papal documents and the blood red wounds of the stigmata, authenticating God's document. In this too, Dante incorporates and heightens a daring pun that is clearly already present in Bonaventure's *Life*. See Herzman, "Dante and Francis," 107, for an analysis of the relationship between Dante and Bonaventure's *Major Life*.

73. I am indebted to McGinn's analysis of the mystical significance of Francis' life for the crucial observation that the tradition that culminates with Francis begins with Paul. In tracing the history of this tradition, McGinn shows that bearing the wounds of Christ was understood in a "generic" way until the twelfth century, that is, until that time it was understood to be a way of describing someone who has led an especially exemplary Christian life. Then it began to be associated particularly with the five wounds of Christ's crucifixion. Francis, here as in so many other ways, took a tradition to the next and definitive level. See *Flowering of Mysticism*, 59 and ff.

## Criminal Invention: Dante, Ovid, and the Bull of Phalaris

JOHN KLEINER

Torture is everywhere in Hell and yet the closest we come to an open discussion of it is in a simile. Dante begins *Inferno* 27 by likening Guido da Montefeltro to a victim of the bull of Phalaris. This leads him to recall the story of the bull's creation and in turn to comment on the fate of Perillus, its creator. "E ciò fu dritto," he asserts; it is only fitting that the inventor of such a monstrous device should be the first to suffer inside it. The simile is elaborate, even tortured; the judgment straightforward, or at least seemingly so. Commentators on *Inferno* 27 have mostly taken it for granted that Dante has worked Perillus into the canto in order to condemn what he represents.<sup>1</sup> This essay offers a different interpretation. Line 8 of *Inferno* 27 is, I shall argue, a calculated equivocation—a denunciation of Perillus' art that can, just as plausibly, be read as a celebration of it.

By the time Dante comes to write about the Sicilian bull, it is already part of a long, well-established but not entirely consistent literary tradition. One branch of that tradition consists of encyclopedic writers whose versions of the legend are, starting with Pietro's 1340 commentary, repeatedly cited as Dante's sources.<sup>2</sup> Valerius Maximus tells the story in the ninth book of his "Memorable Doings and Sayings," in a section devoted to multifarious forms of human cruelty. The sculptor and his bull are sandwiched between the Persian King Artaxerxes who killed his sister (she also happened to be his mother-in-law) by burying her alive head downwards and some particularly vicious Etruscans who disposed of their enemies by clamping them face to face with corpses and then leaving them to rot. Though his telling of the Perillus legend is relatively brief,

Valerius establishes its main features. He explains how the bull operates—a man is placed inside, then a fire is lit beneath—and he explains how Perillus becomes its first casualty. In Valerius's telling, Perillus's invention is noteworthy mainly owing to the "hidden" nature of the torture, the way the bull conceals the form of its victim and the sound of his suffering. This concealment is crucial because, according to Valerius, it eliminates the threat posed by the dying man. So long as every cry for pity emerges as the sound of a lowing bull, the tyrant can witness his victim's suffering without risk of being moved by it.

There was a savage fellow who invented a brazen bull in which victims were enclosed and a fire kindled beneath; they suffered a long and a hidden torture for he so arranged it that the moans that were torn from them sounded like the lowing of a bull, since if they sounded at all like human voices, they might plead for mercy from the tyrant, Phalaris. Now since he was so anxious to torment the unfortunate, the artisan himself was the first to experience the efficiency of his hideous invention.<sup>3</sup>

Pliny cites Perillus's invention in the nineteenth chapter of the thirty-fourth book of his *Natural History*, where it is listed as one of 366 celebrated works done in bronze. Of these 366 it is the only one to be explicitly censured. Pliny describes much the same apparatus as Valerius and, like him, concentrates on the way the bull hides the torment that it causes. Perhaps because sculpture rather than cruelty is his subject, Pliny explicitly condemns Perillus not for his crimes against his fellow men, but for his crimes against art. The proper purpose of "representing gods and men" is, Pliny asserts, to "refine the feelings." Perillus's bull has the opposite effect, that of blunting the emotions it should be eliciting.<sup>4</sup>

No one can commend Perillus; more cruel even than the tyrant Phalaris himself, he made for the tyrant a brazen bull, asserting that when a man was enclosed in it, and fire applied beneath, the cries of the man would resemble the roaring of a bull: however, with a cruelty in this instance marked by justice, the experiment of this torture was first tried upon himself. To such a degree did this man degrade the art of representing gods and men, an art more adapted than any other to refine the feelings! Surely so many persons had not toiled to perfect it in order to make it an instrument of torture! Hence it is that the works of Perillus are only preserved, in order that whoever sees them, may detest the hands that made them.

Pliny, *Natural History* 34.19

In his "seven books against the Pagans," Orosius uses the Perillus legend to support his thesis that as bad as things may appear now—i.e., the early decades of the fifth century—they were far worse in the days of the pagan gods. Once again, the "facts" of the story are consistent with those presented by Valerius, though now with some extra details thrown in. Orosius adds an "ingeniously fashioned" door on the flank of the bull and portrays Perillus as a sycophant who "professed friendship" for the tyrant. In his moralized reading of the episode, Orosius is, if anything, even more insistent. Repeatedly he calls Perillus "cruel." He labels the bull a "nefario spectaculo" and observes that while Phalaris may have delighted with the contrivance, even he detested its contriver.<sup>5</sup>

Phalaris was cruel in his designs and even more cruel in their executions; he perpetrated all kinds of outrages upon innocent people. At length, though unjust himself, he discovered a man whom he punished justly. For a certain Perillus, a worker in bronze, who professed friendship for the tyrant, conceived a work befitting the latter's cruelty. He constructed a brazen bull in whose side he ingeniously fashioned a door that would allow those condemned to be thrust inside the animal. Thus, when the imprisoned victim was roasted by a fire placed underneath, the vacuum of the hollow bronze would magnify his tortured cries and would send forth a sound corresponding, in its funeral tone, to that of its namesake. This abominable wonder made the cries seem like the bellowing of cattle, not the groans of men. Phalaris was delighted with the contrivance, but detested its inventor. It furnished the opportunity for both vengeance and cruelty, for he punished the maker in his own invention.

Orosius, *Seven Books Against the Pagans*

Dante's version of the story, which he relates in just six lines, appears to be a compressed restatement of the legend told by the encyclopedists.<sup>6</sup> Valerius, Pliny, and Orosius emphasize the bull's acoustic properties and so does Dante. They denounce the sculptor and he does, too. But a close comparison of *Inferno* 27 with these earlier accounts of the legend reveals an important difference. As I noted earlier, it is central to the encyclopedists' interpretation of the legend that Perillus's invention hides the torment of its victim. Indeed, this deception is their principal complaint. In *Inferno* 27, the bull doesn't work this way. In fact, according to Dante, the opposite happens.

Come 'l bue cicilian che mugghiò prima  
col pianto di colui, e ciò fu dritto,  
che l'avea temperato con sua lima,

mugghiava con la voce de l'afflitto,  
sì che, con tutto che fosse di rame,  
pur el pareva dal dolor trafitto;  
(*Inf.* 27.7–12)

Instead of hiding the pain of the man inside, Perillus's bull now gives voice to his agony. The wonder of the sculpture is suddenly its vulnerability, the marvelous illusion that its hard, bronze surface could be pierced (*trafitto*) by suffering.<sup>7</sup> In the encyclopedic sources, the instrument of torture justifies its inhuman treatment of the man inside by debasing him, by turning him into a beast. Dante's bull shows inert and inarticulate materials assuming vital expressive power. What's remarkable in this telling of the legend is not the anguish art causes, but the intimation that anguish animates art.

Inversion is, of course, routine in the *Comedy*—a basic and much studied technique of the poem.<sup>8</sup> And the inversion of canto 27 adheres, pretty closely, to the standard pattern. Dante doesn't, as a rule, announce his decision to revise a source; on the contrary, his habit is to pretend to a kind of innocence, to imply that he is merely following along in a given literary tradition when what he is actually doing is violating it. Simply to note this, though, isn't to provide an explanation. When Dante presents the statue of the bull as an emblem of suffering, Perillus's art changes and so, presumably, does the meaning of the poet's denunciation of his work—"e ciò fu dritto." If the refinement of feeling is, as Pliny maintains, the goal of the sculptor's art, then the bull no longer represents the degradation or debasement of that art but seems more properly regarded as an instance and emblem of its fulfillment.

## II

così, per non aver via né forame  
dal principio nel foco, in suo linguaggio  
si convertian le parole grame.  
(*Inf.* 27.13–15)

Most discussions of the bull simile have, reasonably enough, focused on its second half—the part of the simile devoted to Guido speaking from within his tongue of fire. It is here, after all, that the larger moral point of the canto—and the simile—is developed. By explicitly comparing the

sounds that the sculptor and the *condottiere* make from inside their respective torments, the poet implicitly compares the two men and their sins. That sin is, loosely speaking, entrapment; it might more properly be called self-entrapment. Each man's story begins with an invention—in one case a hollow bull, in the other case, a hollow promise—aimed at harming someone else. That invention is then turned back on its creator, to darkly comic effect. Phalaris forces Perillus into the instrument of torture that he, Perillus, has invented; Boniface deceives Guido with the lie that he, Guido, has invented.

It is in this context that the larger significance of Dante's condemnation of Perillus—"e ciò fu dritto"—is established. When the encyclopedic writers point out the justice of the sculptor's fate they are commenting on its formal logic: in his case the punishment fits the crime because the punishment is the crime. For Dante, this formal logic is nothing less than the logic of divine justice. Perillus and Guido are figures for the sin that traps itself, which is sin in general, since, as Dante would have it, all sin traps itself. The rewards it promises are hollow and in the end what it delivers is merely misery and degradation. Every sinner, in this sense, creates the instrument in which he, by rights, will suffer.

But this logic, precisely because it is so rigorous, presents difficulties about which the commentary tradition is oddly silent. In judging Perillus, Petrie asserts, Dante is expressing a "lack of sympathy" and implying "distance" between himself and that other artist.<sup>9</sup> Yet how can we be expected to take such an assertion seriously? (And I don't mean here the assertion of the critic, which is, roughly speaking, accurate; I mean the assertion of distance that the poet seems to imply by presuming to declare the rightness, the justness, of Perillus's punishment.) Perillus enters the poem because of a simile, which is to say because of a poetic assertion of identity. We are told to consider two objects—a bronze bull and a tongue of fire—and to measure them against each other. The bull is a work of art and, more specifically, a work of art whose purpose, or perhaps I should say whose theme, is transformation. And so, too, in its own way, is the tongue. When Guido first addresses Dante from within his flame, his words are incomprehensible; his voice is masked just as the fire masks, or better still steals, his outward form. But then the flame changes. It begins to shake back and forth, to vibrate, and its vibrations create sound and those sounds take the form of words. It is not that Guido speaks to Dante from within the fire in the way that an actor speaks to an audience from

behind a mask. It is, rather, the fire itself that articulates his words like a tongue. And so the bull and tongue enact the same sort of double-sided switch, the same double metamorphosis in which two opposite transfigurations occur simultaneously. Even as the dying man disappears into the bull so that, through his suffering, that dead statue can come to life, so the flame swallows Guido and his words only to transform itself into a living tongue of fire that can speak those words aloud.

The parallel is exacting, so much so that the two objects—tongue and bull—seem to express the same idea, and it is here that the trouble arises. Because Perillus intends his invention to inflict pain on others, he is stuck inside the bull, subjected to his own savage invention. How does this moral logic apply to the flame in which Guido burns? The maker of that tongue of fire, the agent responsible for it, is within the fiction of the *Comedy* Guido. He has become, in Hell, the tongue which burned Penestrino. But what about outside that fiction? To regard the *Comedy* as a work of art is necessarily to give Dante credit—or, if one prefers, responsibility—for what he has, as an artist, accomplished. And this includes not just that fiery tongue but all the vividly imagined and exquisitely degrading torments that the *Inferno* is crammed with. The cannibalism, the burning pitch, the ice, the boiling blood, the demons with swords, and whips and fangs, the cloaks of gold, the rolling stones, the deforming diseases, the twistings of flesh and bone, the metamorphoses into serpents, into bushes, the stink, the mud, the shit—they all belong, in the end, to Dante.

Hell is both an exactly rendered instrument of torture and one that is, like the bull, empty at its center. In the *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid*, the underworld and its sufferings are traversed by a hero from the mythic past. The poet reports from a distance what that hero hears and sees. In the *Comedy*, this ancient convention is rejected. It is the poet himself who becomes the traveler within his own landscape, the artist who places himself inside his own invention, and, in the process, brings it to life. This is the first of Dante's literary innovations, and Dante uses his teacher to dramatize its novelty. Dante does not want to descend into Hell; it is Virgil who says that he must, who insists that it is necessary for him to do so. One could add, because it is right for him to do so. Because it is only just that he do so. ("E ciò fu dritto.") In deciding to make himself his poem's protagonist, Dante is both submitting to its moral logic—he must judge himself—and, at the same time, asserting his artistic primacy. He is the living soul at the center of his invention; it is his pain, translated into

the language—or languages—of the damned, that animates his art. Exactly at the moment that Dante makes a show of taking his distance from Perillus, this is the moment that he comes closest to him.<sup>10</sup>

### III

Et Phalaris tauro violenti membra Perilli  
Torruit: infelix inbuit auctor opus.  
Iustus uterque fuit: neque enim lex aequior ulla est,  
Quam necis artifices arte perire sua.  
Ergo ut periuras merito periuria fallant,  
Exemplo doleat femina laesa suo.

*Ars Amatoria* 1.653–658

Phalaris caused the ferocious Perillus to be burnt within the bull he'd fashioned, and the ill-fated craftsman was the first to put his handiwork to the test. And this was just; there is no fairer law than that contrivers of death should perish by their own contrivances. Since a lie should pay for a lie, let woman be deceived and let her blame no one but herself for the treachery whose example she has set.<sup>11</sup>

Commentators routinely identify Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* as another source for *Inferno* 27, citing it alongside the other versions of the legend. To a certain degree, this grouping makes sense. Present in Ovid's retelling of the Perillus story are the familiar narrative elements—the crime that becomes a punishment, the rush to judgment, the moralized interpretation of the inventor's suffering. At the same time, to lump Ovid's treatment of the legend together with those of Valerius and Orosius is to make a category error—to confuse a parody of an object with that object itself.

In the *Ars Amatoria* Ovid clearly doesn't intend his moralizing about the bull to be taken seriously. The conduct he makes a point of condemning—a girl lying to her boyfriend—is surely no worse than the conduct he commends—a boy lying to his girlfriend. Meanwhile, the whole analogy is, ethically speaking, grotesque. The pretty falsehoods told by lovers clearly shouldn't be compared to the pain suffered by a prisoner as he is tortured to death. The humor of the passage lies in the fact that the old story is being trotted out in a context where it obviously doesn't apply. The net effect is a kind of cruelty. To make art out of one's moral blindness, as Ovid does in the *Ars Amatoria*, is to imitate Perillus on the very terms that the Latin encyclopedists found most reprehensible.



When Ovid returns to the Perillus story a dozen years later, in the *Tristia*, exile appears at once to have sharpened his interest in the legend and to have altered his perspective on it. Perillus is invoked three times in the poem and each time his crime is interpreted through the lens of the poet's own misfortune. (As Ovid notes: "Ut cecidi, subiti perago praeconia casus, / sumque argumenti conditor ipse mei" [Since I fell, I've been the crier of sudden doom, and the author himself is his own theme], 5.1.9–10.) The first time Perillus appears, Ovid is in the midst of addressing an anonymous detractor.<sup>12</sup> He blames this nameless antagonist for his continued disfavor with the emperor and compares his detractor's cruelty to that of Perillus. The implication is that exile, like the bull, is a kind of torture and that he, Ovid, is its miserable victim. In the second allusion, Ovid addresses a different antagonist—a hypothetical reader impatient with the extended lament that constitutes the *Tristia*. Such a reader is, the poet asserts, more heartless than Phalaris.

"At poteras" inquis "melius mala ferre silendo,  
et tacitus casus dissimulare tuos."  
Exigis ut nulli gemitus tormenta sequantur,  
acceptoque graui uulnere flere uetas?  
Ipse Perilleo Phalaris permisit in aere  
edere mugitus et bouis ore queri.  
(5.1.51–56)

'But you'd endure your troubles better in silence,'  
you say, 'by mutely concealing your situation.'  
Do you require torture without a cry:  
forbid tears when a deep wound's been suffered?  
Even Phalaris let Perillus, inside the bronze,  
bellow and moan through the bull's mouth.

In this new arrangement, the poet takes on Perillus's role and the *Tristia*, rather than Ovid's exile, is equated with the bronze bull. Significantly, the instrument of torture is imagined by Ovid to provide an outlet for the misery it causes. The bull has become in this way both the instrument for inflicting pain and the means of expressing it. Ovid's final allusion to Perillus comes very near the end of the *Tristia*, and this time the poet's grievance is with the Muses.

Pace, nouem, uestra liceat dixisse, sorores:  
uos estis nostrae maxima causa fugae.

utque dedit iustas tauri fabricator aeni,  
sic ego do poenas artibus ipse mei.

(5.12.45–48)

With your permission, Muses, let me say: Sisters,  
the nine of you are the main cause of my exile.  
As Perillus, who made the bronze bull, paid the price,  
so I'm paying the penalty for my art.

In this last variation on the theme, a different work of art is identified with the bull: the *Ars Amatoria*. That earlier poem, Ovid claims, is the cause of his exile, or, by the logic of the analogy, the instrument of his self-entrapment.

Sic utinam, quae nil metuentem tale magistrum  
perdidit, in cineres Ars mea uersa foret!

(5.12.67–68)

If only my *Ars Amatoria*, that ruined its author,  
who anticipated no such thing, had turned to ashes!

As the variegated tellings of the legend indicate, Ovid is less interested in fixing the meaning of the story than in playing with it—less concerned with defining his position than with trying out a series of poses. As the *Tristia* proceeds, the bull and its maker undergo successive transformation, a process that implicitly connects Perillus's art and Ovid's; the business of poet and sculptor is equally to change one thing into another. But perhaps what's most striking about the passages from *Tristia*—and what sets them thoroughly at odds with the encyclopedic versions—is Ovid's insistent placement of himself within the bull. No matter what that bull is imagined to signify, Ovid is always the one who is suffering inside it.

Perillus is not mentioned by name in the work of Ovid's that had the most profound influence on Dante. Yet it is the *Metamorphoses* that perhaps best explain the poets' interest in the sculptor. Consider the celebrated passage from Book 6 that renders Philomena's torture. After Tereus has raped her, Philomena cries out that she will denounce Tereus to the world. Tereus seizes her tongue and, with his sword, cuts it out.

Ille indignansem et nomen patris usque vocansem  
luctansemque loqui comprehensam forcipe linguam  
abstulit ense fero; radix micat ultima linguae,

ipsa iacet terraeque tremens inmurmurat atrae,  
utque salire solet mutilatae cauda colubrae,  
palpitat et moriens dominae vestigia quaerit.  
*Metamorphoses* 6.556–61

Tereus seized her tongue  
With pincers, though it cried against the outrage,  
Babbled and made a sound something like “Father,”  
Till the sword cut it off. The mangled root  
Quivered, the severed tongue along the ground  
Lay quivering, making a little murmur,  
Jerking and twitching, the way a serpent does  
Run over by a wheel, and with its dying movement  
Came to its mistress’ feet. . . .

Ovid says nothing about the pain of dismemberment, the blood in Philomena’s mouth. Instead he watches, or at least imagines watching the severed tongue as it twists and turns. The tongue of the brutally raped girl is brought to life by its pain, becoming, in simile, a writhing serpent run over by the wheel of a carriage. The imaginative work here is ghastly, as it is whenever severed ears and eyes and tongues are involved. Ovid’s sympathy for Philomena is, at best, the negative sympathy of a writer’s fascinated with cruelty.

The tradition that *Inferno* 27 belongs in is this Ovidian tradition.<sup>13</sup> When pain transforms itself into pleasure the effect is horrible but also vital. The reader may want to turn away, but the claim has already been made upon his imagination, upon his ear, his eye, and if he is another poet, upon his tongue. Pliny’s assumption that cruelty and art are opposed is, at the very least, naïve, and most probably self-protective. Certainly in the case of poets like Ovid or Dante, it is misleading. Why do Dante and Ovid invoke Perillus? It is not because like the encyclopedists they wish simply to denounce him or to take their distance from him, or even to apologize for any chance resemblance. Rather, Perillus and his bull symbolize the true extent of *their* ambition—to bring art to life at any cost.<sup>14</sup>

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## NOTES

1. Jennifer Petrie, “False Counselors: Guido da Montefeltro” in *Lectura Dantis: Inferno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 357–367, notes that “the authorial comment, ‘and this was just’

(8), implies already a certain distancing on Dante's part, a moral condemnation and a lack of sympathy. As the canto continues, it bears out the impression" (359). Richard H. Lansing, "Submerged Meanings in Dante's Similes (*Inf.* XXVII)," *Dante Studies* 94 (1976), 61–69, observes about Guido and Perillus that "in the end, each is rightly undone by his own invention" (64). So also James G. Truscott, "Ulysses and Guido, *Inf.* XXVI–XXVII," in *Dante Studies* 91 (1973), 47–72: "The *contrapasso* is for Guido as it was for Perillus: both are punished by the symbol of the art by which they hoped to deceive and harm others" (57).

2. Pietro di Dante. *Petri Allegherii super Dantis ipsius genitoris Comoediam Commentarium*. Ed. Vincenzo Nannucci (Florence: G. Piatti, 1845).

3. Valerius Maximus, *Factorum et dictorum memorabilium* 9.2.9: "Saeuus etiam ille aenei tauri inuentor, quo inclusi subditis ignibus longo et abdito cruciatu mugitus resonantem spiritum edere cogeantur, ne eiulatus eorum humano sono uocis expressi Phalaridis tyranni misericordiam implorare possent. quam quia calamitosis deesse uoluit, taeterrimum artis suae opus primus inclusus merito auspicatus est." Text and translation taken from Charles S. Singleton, *The Divine Comedy. Inferno, 2: Commentary* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1975), 472.

4. *Naturalis historia*, trans. John Bostock, H. T. Riley (London: H.G. Bohn, 1855).

5. *Historiarum adversum paganos*, 1.20, trans. Irving Woodworth Raymond (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936): "Ea tempestate Phalaris Siculus Agrigentinos arrepta tyrannide populabatur. qui crudelis mente, commentis crudelior, omnia nefarie in innocentes agens, inuenit aliquando quem iuste puniret iniustus. nam Perillus quidam aeris opifex adfectans tyranni amicitiam, aptum munus crudelitati illius ratus, taurum aeneum fecit, cui fabre ianuam e latere composuit, quae ad contrudendos damnatos receptui foret: ut cum inclusus ibidem subiectis ignibus torreretur, sonum uocis extortae capacitas concaui aeris augeret pulsuque ferali conpetens imagini murmur emitteret, nefarioque spectaculo mugitus pecudis, non hominis gemitus uideretur. sed Phalaris, factum amplexus factorem execratus, et ultioni materiam praebuit et crudelitati: nam ipsum opificem sua inuentione puniuit."

6. Lansing, "Dante's allusion to the 'bue cilician' requires the reader to call to mind the entire story, even though it is, rather than retold, merely adumbrated" (63).

7. In the Latin texts, what appears on the outside—the lowing bull—and what's hidden within—the dying man—are at odds. The art work in this way disguises, or to use a harsher term, lies. It hides the truth—of human suffering—which we should be attending to. In *Inferno* 27, by contrast, there's an insistence on continuity—on art's deceptive veracity; the pain may appear on the surface to be an illusion—bronze doesn't really suffer—but it actually expresses an underlying truth. The sculpture seems marvelously alive because it really is alive. A nice double for this is found in the legend of Daedalus's cow. Daedalus's construction disguises Pasiphae's human form—she is a false cow—but it accurately represents her degrading passion. What is more bestial than bestiality? Her story is shouted aloud by the Lustful in Purgatory because it expresses, metaphorically, what is true of their passion as well, that it is profoundly unworthy of them. Daedalus's art, Perillus's art, Dante's art all seem outlandish not to say grotesque impositions on reality but all are, properly understood, forms of revelation.

8. *The Poetry of Allusion: Virgil and Ovid in Dante's "Comedy,"* eds. Rachel Jacoff and Jeffrey Schnapp (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

9. Petrie, 359.

10. If Dante were unaware of this irony, the link between the two men would, in some ways, only be closer.

11. *Ars Amatoria* 1.653–658.

12. *Tristia* 3.11.37–74.

13. It is a tradition that runs from Ovid to Dante and that runs onward from Dante to Shakespeare and the terrifying jokes over Gloucester's blindness. It is a tradition that runs onward yet further to Lucky and Pozzo and Mr. Blonde.

14. This paper was read in slightly different form at the Dante Vivo conference held at Wellesley College, September 2005.

“Sotto benda”:  
The Women of Dante’s *Canzone* “Doglia  
mi reca” in the Light of Cecco d’Ascoli<sup>1</sup>

TEODOLINDA BAROLINI

Whereas the courtly canzone frequently opens with a conventional address to ladies who then disappear from the poem (Cavalcanti’s “Donna me prega,” Dante’s “Donne ch’avete intelletto d’amore”), the female addressees whom Dante enlists in the struggle against male vice in stanza one of “Doglia mi reca” do not disappear from view but are summoned again prior to the canzone’s midpoint and again at the conclusion. Dante comes back to his female audience half way through the third stanza. The passage in question starts out in a metapoetic key, announcing a change in style toward greater clarity in order to best serve his female audience, and then reaffirms the poet’s role as moral guide, whose compensation will be his audience’s compliance:

Ma perchè lo meo dire util vi sia,  
discenderò del tutto  
in parte ed in costruito  
più lieve, sì che men grave s’intenda:  
che rado sotto benda  
parola oscura giugne ad intelletto;  
per che parlar con voi si vole aperto:  
ma questo vo’ per merto,  
per voi, non per me certo,  
ch’abbiate a vil ciascuno e a dispetto . . .  
  (“Doglia mi reca,” 53–62)

[“But that my speech may be of use to you, I’ll come down from the general to the particular, and to a lighter form of expression, so that it may be less hard to

understand; for seldom under a veil do obscure words reach the intellect, hence with you one must speak openly. But this I want in recompense (for your own good, certainly not for mine) that you hold every man as vile and as object of scorn . . .”]<sup>2</sup>

There is an interesting insecurity in the commentary tradition regarding “sotto benda” in verse 57: does Dante refer to the literal article of clothing (*benda* is the “strip of cloth or silk with which married women wrapped their cheeks, temples, and forehead for ornamentation and to hold their hair”) and therefore, by synecdoche, to those who wear it—namely women—or does he refer to an allegorical veil, a veil of language?<sup>3</sup> The allegorical reading has taken precedence in the twentieth-century commentary tradition over the literal. While the Barbi-Pernicone commentary takes a no-nonsense literal approach, glossing “sotto benda” as “in cervello di donna,”<sup>4</sup> Contini gives primacy to the allegorical: “La *benda* è la stessa imagine che il *velame de li versi strani* (*Inf.* IX 63) e il *velo* di *Purg.* VIII 20. Attraente tuttavia la dichiarazione, di più studiosi, che *benda* sia l’ornamento femminile, e s’abbia dunque allusione a una necessità di chiarezza maggiore con donne.”<sup>5</sup> Foster and Boyde follow Contini, starting with the allegorical and adding that “the other interpretation”—i.e., the literal interpretation—“is also attractive: this takes *benda* as the wimple worn by women.”<sup>6</sup>

I believe that it is important to restore as primary the literal meaning of “sotto benda” in this passage in “Doglia mi reca” and, along with the literal meaning, to recuperate the gendered nature of Dante’s intervention. Indeed, the result of focusing on the allegorical reading of “sotto benda” is to elide out of the text the gendered aspect of what Dante says. Contemporary evidence, in the form of lexical usage and responses to Dante’s verses by other poets, indicates that the literal meaning should be taken as primary.

If we look at the entries for *benda* and *velo* in the *Grande dizionario italiano* we see that *benda* is much less given to metaphorical extrapolation than *velo*.<sup>7</sup> Thus, Contini’s intermingling of “benda” with *Inferno* 9’s overtly metatextual “velame de li versi strani” and *Purgatorio* 8’s similarly metatextual “velo” (“La *benda* è la stessa imagine che il *velame de li versi strani* (*Inf.* IX 63) e il *velo* di *Purg.* VIII 20”) may not be appropriate. Dante’s usage corresponds to the perception of greater metaphorical license given to *velo*: the noun *velo* and the verb *velare* are used frequently

across the gamut of Dante's works (*Rime*, *Fiore*, *Vita Nuova*, *Convivio*, *Commedia*) and across a semantic range from literal to metaphorical. Moreover, even the literal *velo* has a more poetic quality than *benda*, so that the *Vita Nuova*—a text that creates a social context but makes sure to keep it highly stylized—offers two uses of *velo* as covering (what is being covered is Beatrice's dead body, so these uses belong to the context of mourning practices), but never the more socially attuned *benda*.<sup>8</sup>

Dante uses *benda* infrequently but cogently (all his uses are cited under "benda" by *TLIO*, the *Tesoro della lingua italiana delle origini*, indicating that they are considered linguistically formative): he uses *benda* first in our passage in "Doglia mi reca," and then three times in the *Commedia*, where it is always a signifier of a woman's marital status, either in the secular sphere (never married or widowed and remarried) or in the monastic. Thus, the remarriage of Beatrice d'Este is signified through the change in the color of her *bende* ("che trasmutò le bianche bende" [*Purg.* 8.74])<sup>9</sup>; the nubile young lady of Bonagiunta's prophecy "non porta ancor benda" (*Purg.* 24.43)<sup>10</sup>; and "sacre bende" (*Par.* 3.114) signify that Costanza is the bride of Christ.<sup>11</sup> *Benda* is a word deployed by Dante univocally to refer to socially mandated and regulated female covering.

The verses in "Doglia mi reca" indicating women through the synecdoche "sotto benda" elicited responses from two important contemporaries, the doctor and astrologer Cecco d'Ascoli (1269–1327) and Petrarch (1304–1374). Both interpret "sotto benda" literally as referring to women. (In fact, *TLIO* glosses "sotto benda" as meaning "donna" and gives the examples of "Doglia mi reca" and the responses from Cecco and Petrarch;<sup>12</sup> the allegorical significance is considered "less probable" and is probably only mentioned in deference to the already discussed commentary tradition.) In the conclusion to the political canzone "O aspectata in ciel," Petrarch writes that love resides not only "sotto bende," "under veils" (*Canzoniere* 28.113), in order to make the point that a canzone inspired by a non-erotic form of love can nonetheless take its place with pride among its fellows. In his commentary to Petrarch's canzone, Santagata cites "Doglia mi reca" as the source for "sotto bende" and notes that Petrarch evidently interprets the debated verses from Dante's canzone in the same manner as Cecco d'Ascoli in *Acerba*.<sup>13</sup> Cecco d'Ascoli cites the verses from "Doglia mi reca" in his encyclopedic *Acerba*, in the context of a misogynist *capitolo* dedicated to his negative views of women. Here Dante is used as an *auctoritas* on female intellectual limitations. Cecco

notes that rarely are subtle thoughts understood by those who are “sotto benna”—i.e., by women: “Rare fiate, como disse Dante, / s’intende sottil cosa sotto benna” (*Acerba* 4.9.4397–4398).<sup>14</sup>

Cecco’s response to Dante’s passage regarding women in “Doglia mi reca” is extremely interesting, for he both appropriates and changes the canzone’s “sotto benda” passage. Thus, while it is true, as the Barbi-Pernicone commentary points out, that Cecco understands Dante correctly, in that he takes “sotto benda” as a reference to women, it is also true that Cecco works considerable changes on Dante’s passage, which he appropriates to his own misogynist ends. Because Dante *wants* to communicate with women, he voices his concerns that rarely will an obscure word (“parola oscura”) reach the intellect of one under the veil and that difficult language will make communication with women difficult to achieve, and he uses this concern as a platform from which to announce a shift toward a more accessible style. (The ideological importance of this passage is, if anything, heightened by its being misleading: the style of the canzone is *not* noticeably lightened—in the sense of simplified—after the poet’s declaration. It is, however, more dramatic, especially in the stanza that immediately follows.)

Cecco, on the other hand, changes “parola oscura” to “sottil cosa”—a “subtle thought”—and uses the passage from “Doglia mi reca” as a platform from which to launch a savage invective against women, who are beings without intellect and “fruit of all evil”: “La femmina ha men fede che una fiera, / Radice, ramo e frutto d’ogni male, / Superba, avara, sciocca, matta e austera, / Veleno che avvelena il cuor del corpo, / Iniqua strada alla porta infernale” (*Acerba* 4.9.4403–4407). Moreover, Cecco takes the citation from “Doglia mi reca” as an opportunity to pen one of his sardonic indictments of Dante (most of which are focused on the *Commedia*). Here he paints Dante as a foolish naïf whose belief that women possess intellect is the equivalent of looking for the Virgin Mary in the streets of Ravenna: “Maria va cercando per Ravenna / chi crede che in donna sia intellecto” (*Acerba* 4.9.4401–4402).

Cecco’s misogynist diatribe and passing dig at Dante offer us a valuable perspective from which to gauge the force and direction of Dante’s gendered intervention in “Doglia mi reca.” We remember that Dante interrupts his canzone to address the ladies. Because he desires his speech to be of use to them, he writes, he will descend from the general to the particular, and to a lighter form of expression, so that it will be less difficult



to understand. Seldom, Dante explains, does obscure language reach the intellect of a woman; hence with a woman it behooves him to speak openly. No doubt the patronizing tone of this passage is annoying. At the same time we do well to keep in mind that these verses testify to Dante's genuine concern that the women to whom he writes understand him, and that they be authentic comprehenders and recipients of his message—maybe even authentic interlocutors, given that this poem's *congedo* explicitly sends it to a woman. Most of all, as Cecco's response helps us to see, Dante's intervention is founded in a belief in women's intellect—an intellect whose existence is taken for granted and that he seeks to reach. In order to reach it, in order to communicate with women, he says he will change his discourse, lowering it to the level of their comprehension. Cecco, who dismisses as foolish the belief that women possess any intellect at all, gives us the vantage from which to see that Dante's paternalism is an affirmation: women possess intellect, he is saying, and it is up to me as poet to figure out how to reach it.

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## NOTES

1. I believe there is some merit in bringing this note, a historically contextualized gloss on two words in one of Dante's *canzoni*, to the attention of a specialized audience of Dante scholars. I have elaborated the linguistic evidence in this note, which is part of a broader discussion in my "Lifting the Veil? Notes toward a Gendered History of Early Italian Literature," in *Medieval Constructions in Gender and Identity: Essays in Honor of Joan M. Ferrante*, ed. Teodolinda Barolini (Tempe, Arizona: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 2005), 169–90.

2. The text of the canzone is cited from *Rime della maturità e dell'esilio*, eds. Michele Barbi and Vincenzo Pernicone (Florence: Le Monnier, 1969). Translations are mine throughout.

3. The definition is from Maria Giuseppina Muzzarelli, *Guardaroba medievale: Vesti e società dal XIII al XVI secolo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1999), whose Glossary defines *benda* thus: "striscia di tela o di seta con cui le donne sposate si avvolgevano guance, tempie e fronte per ornamento e per trattenere i capelli" (353).

4. *Rime della maturità e dell'esilio*, 613. Barbi's material was published posthumously by Pernicone; hence, despite the 1969 date, it is of earlier vintage.

5. *Rime*, ed. Gianfranco Contini (Milan: Einaudi: 1946; 2nd ed. 1965), 186.

6. *Dante's Lyric Poetry*, eds. Kenelm Foster and Patrick Boyde, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 2.304–05.

7. Salvatore Battaglia, *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*, vols. 2 and 21 (Turin: Unione tipografico-editrice torinese: [1961]–2002).

8. In the second canzone of the *Vita Nuova*, "Donna pietosa e di novella etate," Dante imagines that Beatrice is dead and that attending ladies cover her with a veil: "Lo imaginar fallace / mi condusse a veder madonna morta; / e quand'io l'avea scorta, / vedea che donne la covrian d'un velo"

(65–68). The preceding prose specifies what part of her body is covered and the color of the veil: “e pareami che donne la covrissero, cioè la testa, con uno bianco velo” (23.8). As we can see from the difference between these two passages, the prose offers greater historical and sociological precision. The text is cited from the edition of Domenico De Robertis, *Vita Nuova* (Milan: Ricciardi, 1980).

9. *TLIO*, *Tesoro della lingua italiana delle origini* (<http://tlio.ovi.cnr.it/TLIO/ricindex.html>, s.v. “benda”), cites these verses as the first of two examples (the second is from Boccaccio’s *Corbaccio*) under heading 1.1.1 [Di colore bianco come segno di vedovanza].

10. *TLIO* cites these verses as the second of two examples (the first is from Cecco Angiolieri) under heading 1.1.2 Fras. Portare benda: essere maritata.

11. *TLIO* cites these verses as the first of six examples under heading 1.3 Velo monacale o sacerdotale.

12. *TLIO* cites Dante and his illustrious respondents under heading 1.2 Estens. Donna (in quanto indumento femminile per eccellenza). Locuz. avv. Sotto benda: in donna:

[1] Dante, *Rime*, a. 1321, 49.57, pag. 186: Ma perché lo meo dire util vi sia, / discenderò del tutto / in parte ed in costruito / più lieve, sì che men grave s’intenda: / ché rado sotto benda / parola oscura giugne ad intelletto; / per che parlar con voi si vole aperto . . . || Meno prob. il signif. di ‘significato allegorico’, come in *Inf.* IX 63 «il velame de li versi strani».

[2] Cecco d’Ascoli, *Acerba*, a. 1327 (tosc./ascol.), L. 4, cap. 9.4398, pag. 382: Rare fiate, come disse Dante, / S’intende sottil cosa sotto benna: / Dunque, con lor perché tanto millante?

[3] Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, a. 1374, 28.113, pag. 39: Or movi, non smarrir l’altre compagne, / ché non pur sotto bende / alberga Amor, per cui si ride et piagne.

13. *Canzoniere*, ed. Marco Santagata (Milan: Mondadori, 1996), 154.

14. Cecco d’Ascoli (Francesco Stabili), *L’Acerba*, ed. Achille Crespi (Ascoli Piceno: Cesari, 1927).

# Sodomy, Diversity, Cosmopolitanism: Dante and the Limits of the *Polis*

GREGORY B. STONE

W can read the *Comedy* hastily, bringing to bear our normal assumptions concerning the strict piety that supposedly ruled the thinking of medieval Christians. We assume that medieval people abhorred homosexuals. And indeed it is easy to look at *Inferno* and see that Dante consigns homosexuals to Hell. We might even formulate a phrase for the textbooks: “Homosexuality is a sin of violence against nature punished by eternal damnation in the Seventh Circle of Hell.” Most students today, who are often not expected to read beyond *Inferno*, leave their study of Dante believing that this is his “position” on homosexuality. Such students are guilty (but it is their teachers who are to blame) of the same error that contributed to Paolo and Francesca’s eternal damnation—the failure to read a book all the way through to its end.

But if we read beyond *Inferno* we will find that Dante encounters, on the highest terrace of Mt. Purgatory, two groups of shades filing past each other, like two columns of ants moving in opposite directions. Both groups are souls that need to purge themselves of their excessive sexuality: in life on earth they were too greatly occupied with satisfying physical desire. Now they are trained in the moderate exercise of affection:

Lì veggio d’ogne parte farsi presta  
ciascun’ ombra e basciarsi una con una  
sanza restar, contente a brieve festa.  
(*Purg.* 26.31–33)<sup>1</sup>

Situating these souls on the highest terrace of Purgatory, Dante is representing “lust” as the least serious, most innocent of human errors. Of all

the souls undergoing purgation, these are in closest proximity to the locus of innocence, the Earthly Paradise (Garden of Eden) at the summit of the mountain. Dante had made the same point in *Inferno* by assigning the lustful to Hell's first circle, indicating that sins of sexuality are the least offensive to God. If Dante is a Christian, he is not one of those sex-obsessed ascetics, those flesh-denying spiritual athletes who rank sexuality as the gravest threat to salvation—just so that they themselves can be ranked most worthy to be saved.

Purgatory is a place through which souls are passing on their way to Heaven. It is axiomatic that every soul in Purgatory (Virgil is perhaps the one exception) has been saved and will eventually take her or his seat in God's Court, the Eternal City, the Celestial Rose. Each individual in these two columns of once-lustful shades need fear Hell no longer: he or she has been blessed with eternal salvation.

Now, the members of one of these groups, as they march single file past the members of the other, are shouting "Soddoma e Gomorra!" The members of the other group, for their part, shout "Ne la vacca entra Pasife, / perché 'l torello a sua lussuria corra" (*Purg.* 26.40–42), referring to Pasiphaë, the wife of King Minos of Crete, who donned a specially constructed cow suit so that she would attract and be mounted by a bull. The members of the former group, who have committed the sin "per che già Cesar, triūnfando, / 'Regina' contra sé chiamar s'intese" (*Purg.* 26.77–78), are homosexuals. The members of the latter group, who did not observe human laws governing sexual relations but rather are guilty of "seguendo come bestie l'appetito" (*Purg.* 26.84), are heterosexuals. By placing these two groups on the same terrace and through the symmetry with which they are presented, Dante portrays excessive homosexual practice and excessive heterosexual practice as sins that are "equal but different"—and both equally minor, relatively innocent.

Bearing in mind that *all* souls in Purgatory end up in Heaven and that this group of homosexuals appears as numerous as a trail of ants, a simple logic imposes itself: Heaven is home to countless homosexuals. It is plain wrong to teach that Dante consigns homosexuals to Hell. The most one can say is that he places in Hell some individuals whom he seems to represent as having been homosexuals; but, if he places them there, it is not primarily on account of their homosexuality. Some homosexuals are in Hell for a larger sin. We shall call it "sodomy," and we shall inquire as to its essential definition. Sodomy has little to do with a certain manner

of deploying one's sexual organs, nor with deploying those organs in the penetration of a certain object.

In *Purgatory* 17 Virgil explains that each of the sins purged on the seven terraces of Mt. Purgatory involves a certain error in loving. There are two modes of such error: we may love a "wrong thing" ("malo obietto," 95), or we may love a right thing but to the wrong degree, either too much or too little. The wrong things that we love are all subsumed under the category "harm to our neighbor." There are three ways in which we may do harm to our neighbor, corresponding to the sins of Pride, Envy, and Wrath—the sins purged on the three lower terraces of Purgatory. The sins purged on the four upper terraces, on the contrary, involve modes of loving good things. On the fourth and central terrace are purged those who have loved *the Good*, yet have done so in a "lukewarm" manner (this is the sin more commonly known as Sloth). On the mountain's upper three terraces are purged the sins of those who have loved some "other good" ("altro ben," *Purg.* 17.133) to such an excessive extent that they are hindered from loving *the Good*. The "other goods" in question here are money, food, and sex, and the sins of loving these good things too much are known, respectively, as Avarice, Gluttony, and Lust.

The point here is this: the ethical structure of Purgatory prevents us from thinking of homosexuality as the love of a "wrong thing" ("malo obietto"). Rather, it is very clear that the object of homosexual desire (no less than the object of heterosexual desire)—counts among the "other goods" that humans sometimes love. What is purged on the mountain's highest terrace is not homosexual or heterosexual practice but rather excess in such practice, given that excessive love for any of the "other goods" will tend to divert one away from loving *the Good*. Dante does not lead us to think that *all* homosexuals must undergo this particular purgation; this purgation is assigned only to those whose sexual practice presents an obstacle to their loving the Good. The tempered practice of homosexual as well as heterosexual relations is in no way sinful.<sup>2</sup>

Dante criticism conventionally reserves the term "the sodomites" for one of the groups of souls punished in the third ring of the Seventh Circle of Hell. In what follows I will be reading the relevant cantos of *Inferno* with an eye toward discerning the determining characteristic of "sodomy." Are the sodomites homosexuals, or is sodomy something other than sexual? If it is something other, what is it? What is the relation between sodomy and the *polis*? What is the politics of sodomy?

## Poetry Beyond Sodom and Cahors

Sodomy, in *Inferno*, is categorized as one of the modes of violence—more particularly, as a kind of “violence against nature.” We need to understand this categorization in its proper light.

In *Inferno* 11 Virgil explains that the primary modes of violence are threefold, distinguished by the object on whom violence is inflicted: “A Dio, a sé, al prossimo si pone / far forza” (*Inf.* 11.31–32). Accordingly, the Seventh Circle of Hell, which is reserved for the violent, is constructed of three concentric rings: the outermost is a river of boiling blood which torments those who have committed violence against other humans (“al prossimo”); the middle is a dense and thorny thicket literally comprised of those who, through suicide, have committed violence against themselves (“a sé”); the innermost is a barren sandy desert inhabited by those who have committed violence against God (“A Dio”).

One may have noticed that “violence against nature” does not appear as one of the three primary categories of violence. This is because “violence against nature” is a subcategory of one of those primary categories—“violence against God”: given that Nature is God’s agent, to offend her is at the same time to offend God. Thus, among the sinners condemned to the innermost ring—the barren sandy desert—of the Seventh Circle of Hell, Virgil further distinguishes between those who have committed violence directly against God (blasphemers) and those who have indirectly committed violence against God by committing violence against Nature:

Puossi far forza ne la deïtade,  
col cor negando e bestemmiano quella,  
e spregiando natura e sua bontade;

e però lo minor giron suggella  
del segno suo e Soddoma e Caorsa  
e chi, spregiando Dio col cor, favella.  
(*Inf.* 11.46–51)

In this barren desert there are *on the one hand* blasphemers, whose violence is directed against God Himself, and *on the other hand* persons of “Sodom and Cahors,” whose violence is directed against Nature. The persons of Sodom are evidently homosexuals. (As these cantos unfold, sodomy and homosexuality *initially* appear as synonyms; by the end we will come to

see that they are not interchangeable terms, that Dante employs homosexuality as a *figure* for sodomy: he guides us along a path of thinking, letting us at first assume our familiar understanding of sodomy as homosexuality, ultimately so that we will enlarge and transform that understanding.) The persons of Cahors are recognizably usurers (Cahors, a city in what is now Southwest France, was a financial center associated in Dante's day with usury). So, the third ring of the Seventh Circle of Hell punishes three groups of sinners—blasphemers, homosexuals, usurers—, and the latter two groups are themselves grouped together and distinguished from the former group.

Whatever else it signifies, this distinction between blasphemers, on the one hand, and homosexuals and usurers, on the other, directs us to consider that the latter two sins are somehow specially related. We see that there is a certain strong link, a pertinent bond between the essence of homosexuality and the essence of usury: both are termed “violence against nature.”

How are we to understand “nature” as that which both homosexuality and usury somehow violate? What is the pertinent sense of “nature” that is in play here? Fortunately, as Virgil continues his discourse, he gives us sufficient indication of the operative meaning of *natura*, explaining, in particular, why usury is “unnatural.” At the same time, he introduces into the mix a third term, poetry (art)—so that what is at stake for us now is determining the implicit logic underlying the nexus homosexuality-usury-poetry (art):

“Filosofia,” mi disse, “a chi la ’ntende,  
nota, non pure in una sola parte,  
come natura lo suo corso prende

dal divino ’ntelletto e da sua arte;  
e se tu ben la tua Fisica note,  
tu troverai, non dopo molte carte,

che l’arte vostra quella, quanto pote,  
segue, come ’l maestro fa ’l discente;  
sì che vostr’ arte [i.e., poetry] a Dio quasi è nepote.

Da queste due [i.e., art / poetry and nature], se tu ti rechi a mente  
lo Genesi dal principio, convene  
prender sua vita e avanzar la gente;

e perché l'usuriere altra via tene,  
per sé natura e per la sua seguace  
dispregia, poi ch'in altro pon la spene."

(Inf. 11.97–111)

Here Virgil presents a concise theory of art (poetry) as *mimesis*, imitation.<sup>3</sup> While the notion that art is two generations removed from God ("vostr' arte a Dio quasi è nepote" [*nepote* here signifying "grandson"]) may call to mind Plato's view of the art-work as the "imitation of an imitation," this passage instead works to deny Plato's negative judgment against poetic *mimesis*. Following Aristotle's *Physics* (to which he explicitly refers), Virgil does not regard *natura* as a set of existing things to be copied by the artist, but rather as an operating agent—not a *cosa* ("thing") but a *causa*, a cause of things (as Aristotle says: "It is plain then that nature is a cause, a cause that operates for a purpose").<sup>4</sup>

This Aristotelian theory of *mimesis* continues to conceive of poetry as the imitation of nature, and it similarly continues to conceive of nature as the imitation of the divine. But the distance mapped out in Plato's theory between poetry and the divine is overcome, as the divine itself is conceived in terms of poetic art: *natura*, imitating God, acts as a poet. Art is not a representation of nature but rather is nature's fundamental principle. The emphasis is not on poetry's alienation from but rather its direct *kinship* to nature and to God (poetry is, so to speak, the child of *Natura*, who is the child of God). Poetry is the imitation of nature's poetic creativity, itself an imitation of divine poetic creativity. But *mimesis* no longer means "mere imitation," as if it were an always inadequate attempt, subsequent to creative causality, to provide a copy or representation of a higher reality. Rather, to imitate nature in the manner of a poet is to act as nature acts, and nature acts in the manner of the Divine Poet, causing real things to come into being.<sup>5</sup>

Poetry, then, is entirely "natural." But nature, for her part, is thoroughly "poetic." Poetry is introduced here as the perfectly "natural" third term against which to measure the failure of two "unnatural" alternatives (sodomy and usury).

Poetry is nearly synonymous with nature. The Latin *natura*, in its primary sense, translates the Greek *genesis*, which means "birth." Part of the effect of Virgil's reference to the title of Genesis is to solidify this identity: it affirms that *natura* is thought here primarily as "birth." Virgil's invoking



the title of Aristotle's *Physics* also plays a role here: *physis* means "nature" in the sense of originating power, growth, coming-to-be. Nature is the originating act of setting into motion growth, becoming and change (as Aristotle says, "nature (*physis*) is a principle of motion and change."<sup>6</sup> Nature is, in a word, birth.

"Violence against nature," then, is violence against the principle of birth—a failure to participate as an agent in the origination of growth, becoming, and change. Sodomites and usurers, through their aversion to or perversion of birth, fail to act naturally and poetically.

It is easy to see why sodomy, understood simply as homosexual intercourse, might be construed as "violence against nature" in this special sense. Dante does not ask Virgil for an explanation since the logic is not difficult to grasp. Homosexuality is "unnatural," not because nature (conceived as the totality of things in the cosmos) does not normally include homosexuals nor because homosexuals do something that humans do not naturally do, but simply and only in the sense that homosexual intercourse does not generate, does not aim primarily for *genesis*, *natura*, birth.<sup>7</sup>

If sodomy is the aversion to birth, usury is birth's perversion. Such a thought will remain somewhat opaque for us unless we bear in mind that Dante was familiar with a tradition, extending back to the Greeks, which considered financial interest to be, as it were, the "child" of its principal: lending money for interest was perceived to be a mode of reproduction, as indicated by the fact that interest was termed "offspring" (*tokos*).<sup>8</sup> The usurious transaction is a false simulacrum of *natura*, birth. In his *Politics*, Aristotle offers the definitive formulation of usury as "unnatural" (contrary to the proper project of reproduction): "For money was intended to be used in exchange, but not to increase at interest. And this term interest, which means *the birth of money from money*, is applied to the breeding of money because *the offspring resembles the parent*. That is why of all modes of getting wealth this is the most unnatural."<sup>9</sup> Aquinas, in his commentary on this passage, offers a useful paraphrase: "Thus, a kind of birth takes place when money grows from money [*denarius ex denario crescit*]. For this reason the acquisition of money is especially contrary to Nature, because it is in accordance with Nature that money should increase from natural goods and not from money itself."<sup>10</sup>

We gather from these passages that lending at interest is seen as an extreme instance of "in-breeding": the "parent" (money) mates, not just with its own kind but with itself (money), and the product of this perverse

self-coupling is nothing other than more self (money): *denarius ex denario crescit*. One and the same—*denarius*—is father, mother, and child, as positions that ought to open outward toward diversity are collapsed into a monolithic unit. Most “unnatural” is the strictly duplicate identity of parent and child: usurious reproduction is a closed-circuit of absolute self-identity that leaves no space for the emergence of difference. The implication is that a truly “natural” birth breaks open the closed-circuit of self-identity: *natura* must involve, in Aristotle’s words, “motion and change”—the self must propagate through moving toward another, and the child must move away from and become other than the parent. The problem with usurious reproduction is not that the offspring simply resembles the parent; rather, it is that the offspring *is* the parent. Like homosexuality (as it is understood by medieval thinkers), usury, involving a coupling of the same with itself, is marked by excessive self-identity, a resistance to difference.<sup>11</sup> Unlike homosexuality, usury is reproductive. But the problem with usury is that it is *merely reproductive*; it is not honest-to-goodness *natura* because it is not the productive agent of diversity.

The key to a comprehensive understanding of this nexus (sodomy-usury-poetry) is Virgil’s phrase, *avanzar la gente* (*Inf.* 11.108; cited above). From the earliest Italian commentators on, Dante’s exegetes have recognized this phrase as a rendition of the imperative that God gives humankind in Genesis 1:28: *Crescite et multiplicamini* (“Increase and multiply”). Virgil is saying that through poetry, but *not* through sodomy and usury, humans indeed act naturally, accomplishing their duty to “increase and multiply.” (Note that the Vulgate text renders the first part of this imperative as *Crescite*—the same verb that Aquinas uses in his account of the “birth” or “increase” of money from money [*denarius ex denario crescit*].)

But what does it mean to “increase and multiply”? Why is this imperative twofold? Could God not simply have said to humans, “Increase!”? Is the “Multiply!” redundant, a merely stylistic addition, or does it qualify humankind’s duty in a crucial way?

God commands humankind to “be born,” “grow,” “thrive,” “increase” (some of the meanings of the Latin *crescere*). But is the “increase” or “growth” at stake here merely a matter of number, of population size (after all, this imperative is followed in Genesis 1:28 by the additional command that humans “fill the earth”)? Or should we ask a question once posed by Martin Heidegger: “But what does growing mean? Does it imply only to increase quantitatively, to become more and larger?”<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps the imperative to “multiply” ought to be read as a caveat against the sterility of merely quantitative increase: God tells humans not only to become numerous but, more importantly, to become *diverse*, to *multiply*—render manifold—the species of human nature.

In treating a slightly different question, Aquinas shows awareness of this distinction between the merely quantitative increase in the number of individuals of a species (all of whom have been, are, and will be essentially the same), and a genuine *diversification* which leads to a multiplication of essences. Moreover, he ranks diversification (multiplication) as superior to numerical increase: “The goodness of the species transcends the goodness of the individual, as form transcends matter; therefore, the multiplication of species is a greater addition to the good of the universe than the multiplication of individuals of a single species. The perfection of the universe therefore requires not only a multitude of individuals, but also diverse kinds, and therefore diverse grades of things.”<sup>13</sup> In Aquinas’s eyes, multiplication is more important than increase: the production of diversity pleases God more than the reproduction of what is already there.

Virgil’s rendering *Crescite et multiplicamini* (“Increase and Multiply!”) as *avanzar la gente* (“Move humankind forward!”) tells us that he is endorsing, as truly natural, the progressive, not the conservative, reading of Gen. 1:28. He understands that God has ordered humans to participate as agents in the positive self-alteration of human nature—in a multiplication that is something more than an increase. There is not a single model of humanity, established by God once-and-for-all and to which we must conform; rather, it is our duty to go forth and invent new models of human nature.<sup>14</sup>

We can summarize the results of our inquiry into the nexus sodomy-usury-poetry in the following manner:

**sodomy** is the failure to reproduce, the failure to “increase”

**usury** is mere reproduction, the failure to seek and to produce difference, “increase” without “multiplication,” growth without diversification

**poetry**, the natural alternative, is “increase and multiplication”: not reproduction (duplication), but the production of difference

Sodomy, usury, and poetry signify three possible positions that can be staked out in response to the imperative of Genesis 1:28 (*Crescite et multiplicamini*): we can ignore that imperative altogether (sodomy); we can fulfill it only partially and hence falsely (usury); or we can fulfill it in the most authentic manner (poetry). “Violence against nature” is not simply

the refusal to perpetuate the species. More importantly, it is the refusal to “multiply” (diversify) the species; it is closing the possibility of *natura*, of the birth or emergence of other human natures.

We may have helped to expose the logic of *genesis* underlying the *Comedy*’s coupling together, in the same ring of the Seventh Circle of Hell, sodomites and usurers. But we have not really gotten to the bottom of sodomy. There is something unsatisfying in our continuing to conceive of it as synonymous with homosexuality. Can Dante really have thought it urgent to impress upon us our duty to reproduce? Is failure to take part in the age-old cycle of biological reproduction really a damnable offense? Is the sodomitic “violation of nature” just a man’s preference for a manner of penetration that cannot possibly entail his fathering a child? It is with this question in mind that we turn now to the Brunetto Latini episode.

### Brunetto Latini

Foremost among the sodomites whom Dante meets in the third ring of the Seventh Circle of Hell is Brunetto Latini. Commonly considered “Dante’s teacher,” Brunetto (born ca. 1220), a member of the Guelph party, served his native city of Florence with a long and distinguished career as an administrator, politician, civil servant, orator, and diplomat. And at the same time he was a *writer*—one whose aim was to civilize, reform, and improve the citizens of Florence, to heal the wounds of the divided city, to bring peace to his community. He had a firm trust in the capacity of “letters”—the philosophy and wisdom of the ancients—to bring about a reign of justice and reason. His most substantial book, the *Tresor* (Treasure), which he recommends to Dante at the end of *Inferno* 25 (“Sieti raccomandato il mio Tesoro, / nel qual io vivo ancora, e più non cheggio”; *Inf.* 15.119–120), is one of the primary sources of Dante’s own rich storehouse of ideas. The *Tresor*, by presenting the wisdom of the ancient Greeks and Romans in a vernacular (Brunetto wrote it in French during a period of exile in Paris), establishes the paradigm for Dante’s *Convivio*, a similarly encyclopedic work, written in a vernacular for a “popular” (non-academic) audience. In these and a great many other ways Brunetto was the role model for what Dante was to become: the erudite yet popular politically engaged Florentine writer.

Some of Dante's most cherished notions are anticipated by Brunetto Latini. Foremost among these is the insistence that the intellectual's highest task is to use language for the sake of good government: "Just as gold surpasses all other metals, so the science of speaking well and governing people is nobler than any other in the world."<sup>15</sup> For Brunetto, as for Dante, "political science" is ultimately more important than the arts of language, since it is that for the sake of which language is properly employed: "And know that rhetoric is below that science of governing the city, as Aristotle says in his book . . . just as the art of making saddles and reins is below the art of horsemanship."<sup>16</sup> Brunetto also celebrates the writer's quasi-divine creativity, a notion that appears, as we have seen, in Virgil's discourse in *Inferno* 11. Referring to the first sage, the man of letters who transformed his people from beasts into civilized men, Brunetto says, "and thus, because of the good speech that was in him, combined with wisdom, this man was as a second God."<sup>17</sup> Brunetto teaches that poetry does not simply depict or represent humankind as they already are; rather, its function is to *avanzar la gente*, to institute civil society—a purpose that Brunetto recognizes in the myth of Amphion's building the city of Athens by means of his singing: "And the story tells us that Amphion built the city of Athens: he summoned the rocks and the wood by the sweetness of his song—that is to say that through good words he drew men from the savage rocks where they lived and led them to the communal habitation of this city."<sup>18</sup> The poet's highest calling is to found, through language, the perfect *polis*.

We can also discern some literary or linguistic links bonding together the two Florentine writers. The well-known imagery of *Inferno* 1 is clearly marked by copious borrowing from the following verses, part of the introductory material of Brunetto's *Tesoretto* (an abbreviated rendering, written in Italian, of the *Tresor*):

E io in tal corrotto,  
Pensando a *capo chino*,  
Perdei il gran *cammino*,  
E tenni a la traversa  
D'una *selva* diversa.  
Ma tornando a la mente,  
Mi volsi e puosi mente  
Intorno a la *montagna*;  
E vidi turba mangna

Di *diversi animali*,  
Ch'io *non so ben dir* quali.<sup>19</sup>

With its *selva*, *montagna*, and *cammino*—words that figure very prominently in the *Comedy*'s opening verses; with its *non so ben dir*, which Dante cleverly repeats as *non so ben ridir* (*Inf.* 1.10)—as if to indicate that this has been said before; and with the appearance of *diversi animali*—bringing to mind the well-known trio of beasts which hinder Dante's progress, we cannot help but identify this passage as the source of the *Comedy*'s memorable opening episode, in which Dante tries to find the right way out of a *selva oscura* at the foot of a mountain. And, as if to emphasize Brunetto's influence, when meeting his precursor in *Inferno* 15 Dante makes explicit reference to the events of *Inferno* 1:

Io non osava scender de la strada  
per andar par di lui; ma 'l *capo chino*  
teneva com' uom che reverente vada.

El cominciò: “Qual fortuna o destino  
anzi l'ultimo dì qua giù ti mena?  
e chi è questi che mostra 'l *cammino*?”

“Là sù di sopra, in la vita serena,”  
rispuos' io lui, “*mi smarrì* in una valle,  
avanti che l'età mia fosse piena.”  
(*Inf.* 15.43–51; emphases added)

We are meant to recall the well-known *smarrita* from the *Comedy*'s first stanza (“la diritta via era smarrita”), as well as the *cammin* of its opening line (“nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita”). But, while Dante is surely citing himself here, he indicates that in doing so he is also citing Brunetto—for we recognize in *capo chino* another verbatim borrowing from the verses of the *Tesoretto* that I cited above.<sup>20</sup> Showing us traces of Brunetto's text, Dante has made sure to let us know that Brunetto has left his mark upon him.

Brunetto was Dante's “teacher” not so much in a literal sense, but rather because he stands, more than anyone else, as Dante's most immediate precursor. Given the profound similarities between Brunetto's and Dante's intellectual projects, we cannot help but share Dante's surprise to find his role model among the sodomites condemned to Hell: “Siete voi

qui, ser Brunetto?” (*Inf.* 15.30). In his subsequent reply, Brunetto twice calls Dante his “son” (“O figliuol mio” [*Inf.* 15.31]; “O figliuol” [*Inf.* 15.37]). We might dismiss this as a conventional term of tender affection addressed by an older to a younger man, were it not that, a few *terzine* later, Brunetto’s paternal relation to his “son” Dante is emphasized yet again:

ché 'n la mente m'è fitta, e or m'accora,  
la cara e buona *immagine paterna*  
di voi quando nel mondo ad ora ad ora  
*m'insegnavate come l'uom s'eterna*:  
e quant' io l'abbia in grado, mentr' io vivo  
convien che ne *la mia lingua* si scerna.  
(*Inf.* 15.82–87; emphases added)

Representing his intellectual precursor Brunetto Latini as his “father,” Dante is undoubtedly asking us to conceive of the essence of paternity as something greater than biological generation. Brunetto begets offspring by shaping culturally the identities of followers such as Dante. It is Brunetto’s language, not his penis or his sperm, that has made Dante who he is—as indicated by the fact that Dante’s debt to his cultural father will live on to be “discerned,” not in the physical features of Dante’s face (as would be the case were Brunetto his biological father), but solely in his *lingua*, his “tongue,” the language of his texts (in the language of *Inferno* 1, for instance). The homosexual Brunetto has in fact acted in consonance with nature: he has performed as the agent of *natura*, birth—the birth of a writer whose aims are no less encyclopedic, philosophical, popular, and political than were Brunetto’s. Far from having committed “violence against nature,” he has, by generating Dante, performed his natural duty to *avanzar la gente*.<sup>21</sup>

Brunetto has taught Dante, specifically, the very essence of fatherhood: “You used to teach me how man makes himself eternal” (“m’insegnavate come l'uom s'eterna”). Remarkably, it is none other than a sodomite who teaches the true meaning of the “perpetuation of the human race,” offering a distinctly non-Thomist perspective on how humankind may be said to be “eternal.”

The orthodox Catholic position, formulated by Aquinas, is that man, as far as his earthly life is concerned, *s'eterna* (eternalizes himself, perpetuates himself) through procreation. All humans are mortal, but the human race,

perpetuating itself biologically, attains a measure of immortality. Since sodomy by definition is not procreative, it must be a sin. Only those sexual acts necessary for the “common good”—the perpetuation of the race—are deemed not to fall into the category of “lust.” For Aquinas, sexual acts not “useful” for the preservation of the human race are sinful:

Wherefore just as the use of food can be without sin, if it be taken in due manner and order, as required for the welfare of the body, so also the use of venereal acts can be without sin, provided they be performed in due manner and order, in keeping with the end of human procreation. . . . Now the use of venereal acts . . . is most necessary for the common good, namely the preservation of the human race. Wherefore there is the greatest necessity for observing the order of reason in this matter: so that if anything be done in this connection against the dictate of reason’s ordering, it will be a sin.<sup>22</sup>

A position somewhat more accommodating to sodomy was apparently taught by some of Aquinas’s contemporaries, the so called “Latin Averroists” or “Radical Aristotelians” who stirred up a great deal of controversy in Paris in the 1270s. Among the 219 Averroist theses that were banned by the Bishop of Paris in 1277 was this one: “That a sin against nature, such as an abuse in intercourse, is not against the nature of the individual, although it is against the nature of the species.”<sup>23</sup> According to this thesis, it is “natural” for some individuals to practice sodomy. While acknowledging that, were sodomy universal, humankind could not *s’eterna*, could not “make itself eternal” by perpetuating the species, this thesis seems to accept that there are some humans whose natural sexual practices are not procreative and to allow for a measure of individual sexual freedom. The thesis reminds us that “nature” must be understood in a specific context: while in a sense sodomy is *not* “against human nature” (since there are many individuals whose nature includes the practice of sodomy), in another sense it *is* “against human nature”—since by definition sodomy does not culminate in biological *natura*, procreation.

Dante goes even farther than the Averroist thesis, for he no longer thinks of humankind’s “eternalization” in biological terms. Dante learns from Brunetto’s example that the one who truly perpetuates human *natura* is the writer-educator who, linguistically forming good citizens, strives for the establishment of a virtuous polity. A man “lives on” not through his biological progeny, but through the writings of those whom he has shaped by his writings. And the writings in question must serve a purpose



that transcends the merely literary; they must, like Brunetto Latini's, aim for the formation of civil society, the peaceful polity. In the passage from Aquinas on procreative sex cited above, the "common good" is nothing higher than the biological survival of the species—the *preservation* of life on earth. From this perspective, sodomy can be nothing other than contrary to the common good. But Dante learns from Brunetto to think of a more noble "common good"—the *transformation* of life on earth, leading to the construction of the "good Commune." Man "makes himself eternal" by producing, through the conjunction of writing and politics, an act of *natura*: the origination of an enhanced citizenry, the founding of the perfect political community. The homosexual Brunetto, more than anyone else, represents for Dante the one who truly contributes to the future of the human race.

So we see a gap opening up between homosexuality and sodomy. Brunetto may well be a homosexual, but this fact—his failure to act in a manner befitting biological fathers—is in no way the target of Dante's critique. Quite to the contrary, Dante shows that the conventional Thomistic argument against homosexual intercourse—that it is not useful for procreation—is trivial: because there is a mode of intellectual and cultural "pro-creation" that is the true essence of paternity.

Given that Dante's presentation of Brunetto-as-parent teaches us that human *natura* is a matter of nurture, of culture not biology (in the *Tresor* Brunetto himself remarks: "Nurture surpasses nature, as the proverb says"<sup>24</sup>), we can no longer continue to think that the sin of the "men of Sodom" is their failure to practice vaginal insemination. Brunetto's guilt cannot lie in his aversion to nature-as-birth, for more than anyone he stands as the model of the kind of paternity that truly counts. If Brunetto Latini is a sodomite—and we affirm that he is indeed condemned to Hell for sodomy—then we must seek another understanding of the "violence against nature" of which he is the outstanding example.

There is no doubt that Dante presents Brunetto—a sinner condemned to Hell—in a highly sympathetic light. He is nothing less than Dante's paternal prototype. In every respect he seems more than qualified to stand as one of the *Comedy's* great heroes. And thus, as he takes his leave, he appears as a "winner" not a "loser":

Poi si rivolse, e parve di coloro  
che corrono a Verona il drappo verde

per la campagna; e parve di costoro  
quelli che vince, non colui che perde.  
(*Inf.* 15.121–24)

Brunetto is so close yet so far from the “finishing line”: apparently deserving the prize granted to “the one who wins” (a place in Paradise) but in fact winding up among the ignominious losers.

What is Brunetto’s tragic error, the fatal flaw that prevents him from attaining the blessedness for which he appears qualified and that we know is in store for his “son” Dante? Perhaps homosexuality alone is an offense so serious that it can turn a potential hero into a villain.

Lest we settle for this response, Dante presents himself, at least momentarily, as one who is moved by homosexual desire. Right after Brunetto exits the scene, Dante comes upon three homosexuals—“nudi e untì” (*Inf.* 16.22) who have made “una rota di sé tutti e trei” (*Inf.* 16.21) so as to exchange “battuti e punti” (*Inf.* 16.24). Remarkably, Dante works himself up into such a frenzy of sympathetic desire that were he not afraid of the hellfire, he would himself jump in and join the fun:

S’i’ fossi stato dal foco coperto,  
gittato mi sarei tra lor di sotto,  
e credo che ’l dottor l’avria sofferto;  
ma perch’ io mi sarei bruciato e cotto,  
vinse paura la mia buona voglia  
che di loro abbracciar mi faceva ghiotto.  
(*Inf.* 16.46–51)

We need not regard these lines as indisputable evidence that Dante “was gay.” It is enough to recognize them as Dante’s way of signifying that the crucial difference between him and his “father” cannot be that the latter was moved by homosexual desire—for in this respect the “son” presents himself here as, once again, a chip off the old block.<sup>25</sup>

If sodomy cannot be equated with homosexuality, then what is it? Here it will help to turn to the biblical account of the men of Sodom.

### **Sodom**

The “violent against God (and Nature)”—blasphemers, usurers, homosexuals—are all confined in the third ring of the Seventh Circle of Hell, which is described as a barren plain (“una landa/che dal suo letto

ogne pianta remove"; *Inf.* 14.8–9) and a sandy desert ("Lo spazzo era una rena arida e spessa"; *Inf.* 14.13). All are subject to the same primary mode of punishment: countless bits of flame, in the form of snowflakes, are forever falling upon them:

Sovra tutto 'l sabbion, d'un cader lento,  
piovean di foco dilatate falde,  
come di neve in alpe senza vento.  
(*Inf.* 14.28–30)

These details—the plain, its infertility, the fiery precipitation—tell us without question that this is a "post-Sodom" landscape. For we can read in Genesis that God, exacting vengeance on the inhabitants of the "cities of the Plain," Sodom and Gomorrah, rained fire down upon them, turning their land into a barren desert:

Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the Lord of heaven; and he overthrew those cities, and all the Plain, and all the inhabitants of those cities, and what grew on the ground. (Gen. 19:24–25)

If we are to grasp Dante's conception of sodomy, we need to consider how he may have understood the biblical account of the sin and destruction of "the men of Sodom."

We have become accustomed to thinking that the Old Testament story of the crimes and punishment of "the men of Sodom" is intended to illustrate the evil of homosexuality. But this modern-day understanding is more the product of hearsay than of a real engagement with the text of Genesis.<sup>26</sup> The story of Sodom is part of a larger narrative concerning Abraham's immigration from the land of Ur (present-day Iraq) and his divinely-sanctioned effort to settle in the land of Canaan (present-day Israel). What happens in Sodom needs to be read in the context of a people's attempt to establish a home by settling in the land of others. Leaving his father's house along with his nephew Lot and a few other relatives, Abraham is encouraged by God to trust that one day his wanderings will culminate in the birth of a nation: "Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing'" (Gen. 12:1–2). In the meantime, as conditions dictate that he defer making his new home in Canaan, Abraham is the paradigmatic "stranger,"

the “alien”: “Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to reside there as an alien, for the famine was severe in the land” (Gen. 12:10). In treating the Sodom episode, we need to bear in mind that it plays a significant role in a narrative concerning immigration, “homeland,” national identities, and the encounter between communities of “self” and “other.”

When Abraham eventually does begin to establish a settlement in the land of Canaan, he finds that the land, already inhabited by others, cannot sufficiently support his entire entourage: “Now Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, so that the land could not support both of them living together; for their possessions were so great that they could not live together, and there was strife between the herders of Abraham’s livestock and the herders of Lot’s livestock” (Gen. 13:5–7). Abraham decides to divide his community, leaving Lot to choose which portion of land shall be his:

Then Abram said to Lot, “Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herders and my herders; for we are kindred. Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left.” Lot looked about him, and he saw that the plain of the Jordan was well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar; this was before the Lord had destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. So Lot chose for himself all the plain of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed eastward; thus they separated from each other. Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the Plain and moved his tent as far as Sodom. Now the people of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord. (Gen. 13:8–13)

Here we see that Lot, who will soon appear as the hero of the story of Sodom, is marked, even more so than Abraham, as the quintessential alien, the exile. Lot turns away from the land of Canaan, which is destined to be “home” for the progeny of the original small band of immigrants from Ur; he leaves behind his fledgling nation to seek a new life in a strange city.

We should pause to consider an episode that occurs just before the narration of the story of Sodom proper. By now Abraham, settled in the land of Canaan, has achieved a fair degree of prosperity. One day God appears to him in the form of three strangers passing by his tent (although the text is somewhat vague concerning their identities, these three appear to be God Himself along with two of his angels):

The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. He [i.e., Abraham] looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. He said, "My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes." Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. Then he took curds and milk and that calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate. (Gen. 18:1–8)

As we shall see, this episode directly foreshadows the events centered around Lot's house in Sodom. There, too, God sends these angels in the form of passing strangers, apparently to test the city's comportment toward non-citizen others. For his part, Abraham passes the test brilliantly, for here we see him, with alacrity and enthusiasm, going out of his way to make the strangers "feel at home." It is as if they are the lords of the house and he is their servant—as if Abraham has willingly granted them the identity and status of "self" (rather than "other"). This little episode is meant to open a perspective for reading the story of Sodom that is shortly to follow. It prepares us to see that story as revolving around questions of the status of strangers and the boundaries of community, as meditating on the distinction between "us" and "them."

As the events that will lead to the destruction of Sodom begin to unfold, God indicates to Abraham that He is inclined to destroy the city on account of the great recriminations that He has heard directed against its people:

"How great is the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah and how very grave their sin! I must go down and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me; and if not, I will know." (Gen. 18:20–21)

Abraham and God negotiate the terms of God's justice. Will God destroy Sodom if there are fifty righteous persons there? God replies that he will forgive the whole city for their sake. Will he forgive it for the sake of forty-five righteous ones? Yes. Forty? Yes. Soon Abraham and God have come to terms: if there are ten righteous, Sodom will be spared.

God sends his two angels to Sodom to assess the righteousness and wickedness of the city. They first come upon Lot sitting near the gate of the city—a scene clearly meant to remind us of their previously having come upon Abraham near the door of his tent:

The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them, and bowed down with his face to the ground. He said, "Please, my lords, turn aside to your servant's house and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you can rise early and go on your way." They said, "No, we will spend the night in the square." But he urged them strongly; so they turned aside to him and entered his house; and he made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate. (Gen. 19:1–3)

As Abraham did before him, Lot "passes the test" with his immediate hospitality, his openness and kindness to passing strangers. Lot, who knows from long experience the life of a foreigner, dissolves any boundaries between "self" and "other" by transforming his home into theirs. The essence of righteousness is signified by Lot's refusal to treat others as "aliens."

Such is the context within which we need to understand the wickedness of "sodomy." For the crime of the men of Sodom is more than an attempted homosexual rape; its essence lies in their treating foreigners as "aliens" over whom they enjoy absolute power to control as they please:

But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house; and they called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, so that we may know them." Lot went out of the door to the men, shut the door after him, and said, "I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. Look, I have two daughters who have not known a man; let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please; only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof." But they replied, "Stand back!" And they said, "*This fellow came here as an alien, and he would play the judge!* Now we will deal worse with you than with them." Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and came near the door to break it down. But the men inside reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. And they struck with blindness the men who were once at the door of the house, both small and great, so that they were unable to find the door. (Gen. 19:4–11; emphasis added)

God destroys the city of Sodom for this collective hate crime—an act of violence against strangers that the men of Sodom would never have conceived of perpetrating against themselves. It is clear, especially from their

move to violate Lot, that the act in question is, as we say, not about sex but about power. What angers them most is their perceived threat that the non-native Lot, who hails from outside their “homeland,” would dare make a claim for moral and legal authority. Significantly, it is the entire city, each and every man, which bands together against those whom it deems to be “outsiders,” indicating that sodomy is, in essence, that collective overvaluation of our own identity that we now name “nationalism.”<sup>27</sup>

In offering up his own daughters to the men of Sodom if only they will leave the strangers unmolested, Lot exemplifies the antithesis of sodomy. It is as if he is saying: “*Look to my example: this is how one should regard strangers—as closer to us even than our own daughters! This is how you should regard me, whom you take to be alien.*”

Sodomy is a criminal dispensation of political power. Sodomites are not wicked as individuals; they are wicked as members of a wicked polity. The sodomitic city erects an ideological wall between “us” and “them,” between citizens and non-citizens, between native and alien. Sodomy is overvaluing the rights of “self” and undervaluing the rights of “others.” It is a nation’s collective pride in its own identity, when such pride is used to rationalize treating others as lesser or less than humans.

### **Guelphism and Theory of the Polis**

The sharp-eyed reader may have noticed in my earlier sketch of Brunetto Latini that Dante’s “father” was particularly interested in the formation and governance of *the city*. Brunetto speaks of the “science of governing the city” as the highest of all arts, and he speaks of Amphion’s using his good words to lead men to “the communal habitation of this city.” A glance at the culminating chapter of the *Tresor* reveals that the object of interest for Brunetto’s political science is “la vile” (“the city”)—a term that appears dozens if not scores of times.

In the opening of his *Tesoretto*, Brunetto tells us that the work’s primary aim is to contribute to the healing of his native Florence, a city torn apart by the conflict between Guelphs and Ghibellines. He indicates that nothing in the world is dearer to him than his city:

Tornai a la natura  
C’audivi dir che tene

Ogn'uom ch'al mondo vene:  
E nasce primamente  
Al padre e al parente,  
E poi al suo *comuno*;  
Ond' io non so nessuno  
Cu'i' volesse vedere  
*La mia cittade* avere  
Del tutto a la sua guisa,  
Né che fosse divisa;  
Ma tutti per comune  
Tirassero una fune  
Di pace e di ben fare,  
Ché già non può scampare  
Terra rotta di parte.<sup>28</sup>

Brunetto's most urgent intellectual project is to use his art, learning, and language to bring peace and unity to his own city. His aim is to achieve the perfect polity, the *undivided city*.

This sounds like a noble and unimpeachable project. But we must recall that another famous city, the city of Sodom, was strikingly undivided, absolutely unified in its aggression against outsiders ("the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, *all the people to the last man*, surrounded the house; and they called to Lot"). When the city achieves its measure of unity by banding together to direct its violence against non-citizens, it has become merely a larger form of "faction" or "party"—setting itself up in opposition to and seeing itself as better than other cities.

I mentioned in passing that Brunetto Latini was a distinguished Guelph. The other sodomites with whom Dante converses, the three "naked and oiled" grapplers of *Inferno* 16, all made their name as Guelph politicians. Can there be something particularly "Guelph-like" about sodomy as Dante understands it? Indeed, the tradition of Dante scholarship has long suggested that this is the case.<sup>29</sup>

The conflicts between Guelphs and Ghibellines in Brunetto's day and, later, between White and Black Guelphs in Dante's day, constitute a complicated network of rivalries, entanglements, and alliances that defies any simple analysis. One can say, however, that the explicit ideology of Guelphism was the ideology of the *city* (the "commune" or city-state). Against the Ghibellines, who argued that Italian cities ought to subject themselves to the rule of the Emperor, the Guelphs defended the right of each city



to autonomous self-rule. Brunetto Latini's special devotion to his city is not merely his personal predilection; rather, it marks his work as representing the high-water mark of Guelph political theory.

Brunetto's intellectual work on behalf of the principle of the undivided city appears to mark him as, yet again, Dante's precursor. Does not Dante, too, work to overcome the partisan strife that has torn Florence apart? But in fact Dante only truly comes into his own as a political theorist when he renounces his allegiance to his own city.

Brunetto works to bring about the undivided city; Dante works to bring about an undivided world ("that undivided rule which is called 'empire' "<sup>30</sup>). Brunetto's aim is peace in the city, his own city (*la mia cittade*); Dante's aim is world peace. The whole difference between Brunetto and Dante, and the criterion that makes the former a sodomite, involves the question concerning *the boundaries or limits of one's own polity*. The sodomite erects a wall around the domain that counts as "self" or "citizen." Dante's "cure" for sodomy is the extension of the realm of "self" or "citizen" to the absolute limits of possibility.

We can detect in Brunetto's simple couplets the presence of the Aristotelian theory of the naturally perfect polity. For Brunetto tells us that *first* comes the family, *then* comes the city-state (Commune, *comuno*):

Tornai a la natura  
C'audi dir che tene  
Ogn'uom ch'al mondo vene:  
E nasce primamente  
Al padre e al parente,  
E poi al suo *comuno*.

Aristotle, in his *Politics*, also traces a history of social groupings that begins with paternity and parenthood and culminates in the development of the "city-state." Significantly, Aristotle presents the city-state as entirely natural, almost as if it were biologically determined:

He who thus considers things in their first growth and origin, whether a state or anything else, will obtain the clearest view of them. In the first place there must be a union of those who cannot exist without each other; namely, of male and female, that the race may continue (and this is a union which is formed, not of choice, but because, in common with other animals and with plants, mankind have a natural desire to leave behind them an image of themselves), and of natural ruler and subject, that both may be preserved.<sup>31</sup>

We see that for the Aristotelian tradition of political theory, the polity is a *natural* entity. Thus we should not be surprised to find as we now are that Dante's treatment of "violence against nature" turns out to be a treatment of "violence against the polity." Since nature's highest achievement is humankind, and since humankind is only perfected with the full development of the perfect polity, then anything that prevents the full development of the polity is violence, indeed of the worst kind, against nature.

For our reading of Dante, the most important thing to take from the *Politics* is Aristotle's enumeration of the natural stages in the birth, growth, and development of the polity:

The family is the association established by nature for the supply of men's everyday wants. . . . But when several families are united, and the association aims at something more than the supply of daily needs, the first society to be formed is the village. . . . When several villages are united in a single complete community, large enough to be barely or quite self-sufficing, the state [*polis*, i.e., the city-state] comes into existence, originating in the bare needs of life, and continuing in existence for the sake of a good life. And therefore, if the earlier forms of society are natural, so is the state [city-state], for it is the end of them, and the nature of a thing is its end. For what each thing is when fully developed, we call its nature, whether we are speaking of a man, a horse, or a family. Besides, the final cause and end of a thing is the best, and to be self-sufficing is the end and the best. Hence it is evident that the state is the creation of nature, and that man is by nature a political animal.<sup>32</sup>

According to Aristotle's narrative, the polity has a life-story with beginning, middle, and end: it is born as a family, grows into a village, and reaches maturity as a city-state. And the city-state is the *telos*, the "final cause and end," of the natural development of the polity.

In his commentary on the *Politics*, Aquinas emphasizes that for Aristotle the *city* is the *perfect and natural* end of politics, the *telos* of the development of social groupings:

After having treated of the societies ordered to the city, the Philosopher treats here of civil society itself. This treatise is divided into three parts. First, he shows what kind of society the city is. *Secondly, he shows that it is natural.* Thirdly, he treats of the foundation of the city.

Concerning the first point, he shows of what things the city is made up. For, just as a village is made up of several households, so a city is made up of several villages. *Secondly, he says that the city is a perfect society,* and this he proves from the fact that, since every association among all men is ordered to something

necessary for life, that society will be perfect which is ordered to this: that man have sufficiently whatever is necessary for life. Such a society is the city. For it is of the nature of the city that in it should be found all the things that are sufficient for human life; and so it is. And for this reason it is made up of several villages, in one of which the art of the smith is practiced, in another the art of the weaver, and so of the others. *Hence it is evident that the city is a perfect society.* . . . Then he shows that civil society is natural. In this connection he does three things. First, *he shows that the city is natural.* Secondly, that man is by nature a political animal. Thirdly, he shows what is prior according to nature, whether it is one man, the household, or the city.

Concerning the first point, he sets down two arguments, the first of which is as follows. The end of natural things is their nature. But *the city is the end of the previously mentioned societies*, which were shown to be natural.<sup>33</sup>

The city is the “end” of the village and the family: they are the childhood and adolescence of the polity, the city its adulthood. To violate the development of the polity—stopping it short of the city (as do the “parties” or “factions” of the divided city) or overextending it beyond the city (as do Ghibellines and “Imperialists” such as Dante)—would be an act of “violence against nature.”

We can clearly see how Guelph intellectuals such as Brunetto would have found Aristotle’s *Politics* congenial for their attempt to provide an authoritative philosophical foundation for their defense of the autonomous Commune, the self-contained and undivided city-state. The city is the largest natural polis; to construct something larger would be to commit violence against the natural form of the polity. After humanity has organized itself into autonomous cities, there is no further political work to be done (other than, of course, for each city to work on the maintenance of its own virtue, the healing of its own internal divisions, and its defense against other cities). No larger social grouping (such as province, kingdom, or nation) would be natural. Most unnatural of all would be the maximal grouping which Dante calls “Empire,” which would almost infinitely exceed the natural bounds of the perfect polity. According to Brunetto’s Aristotelian political ideology, Dante’s very purpose in writing the *Comedy*, his strident advocacy of a global *polis*, which monstrously inflates the natural limits of the polity, is nothing less than a terrible “crime against nature.” With so much at stake, Dante turns the tables against Brunetto’s Guelphism by co-opting that charge—presenting his own intellectual father as a political sodomite.

In his own political treatise, *On Kingship*, Aquinas updates Aristotle's *Politics* to fit the conditions of his age. He recognizes that changed historical circumstances—above all the incipient rise of what we call the modern nation-state, epitomized by the expanding power of the King of France (whom Aquinas served in his role as pre-eminent professor at the University of Paris)—necessitate a theory that allows for a polity larger than the city-state. Thus Aquinas adds a further chapter to the biological history of the *polis*: its natural perfection is now the “province” (kingdom):

Since men must live together because they cannot acquire what is needed to live if they remain by themselves, a social group is more perfect if it provides better for the necessities of life. A family in a single household provides adequately for some of the needs of life such as the natural acts of nourishment and the procreation of children, etc. In a single locality you will find self-sufficiency in a given manufacture. But a city which is a perfect community contains whatever is needed for life, and *even more so a province* because of the need for common defense and mutual aid against enemies. Therefore the right name for someone who rules a perfect community, *whether a city or a province*, is a king, while someone who directs a household is not called a king but the father of a family. . . . From what we have said it is clear that a king is one who rules over the people of a *city or a province* for the common good. So Solomon says in Ecclesiastes, “A king commands all the lands subject to him.”<sup>34</sup>

By enlarging his vision of the natural and perfect polity, Aquinas sets a precedent that Dante will follow.

But in the *Monarchy* Dante envisions an absolute enlargement of the polity. Not content merely to update Aristotle to fit current conditions, he formulates a theory of the *polis* yet-to-come, the cosmopolitan polity of the future. Dante would have us fulfill God's imperative that we *avanzar la gente* by proposing a radical advance, something that “no one has attempted to elucidate”<sup>35</sup> ever before: we must “increase and multiply” the territory of the natural and perfect polity to the very limits of possibility, thereby fulfilling the second half of the humankind's duty, to “fill the earth” (Gen. 1:28: “Increase and multiply, and fill the earth”).

We see Dante's polemic against Aristotelian-Thomist political theory most clearly in his revised enumeration of the usual stages in the birth, growth, development, and natural end of the polity:

And to throw light on the matter we are inquiring into, it should be borne in mind that, just as there is a particular purpose for which nature produces the

thumb, and a different one for which she produces the whole hand, and again a purpose different from both of these for which she produces the arm, and a purpose different from all of these for which she produces the whole person; in the same way there is one purpose for which the individual person is designed, another for *the household*, another for *the small community*, yet another for *the city*, and another for *the kingdom*; and finally the best purpose of all is the one which *God Everlasting with his art, which is nature*, brings into being *the whole of mankind*. And it is this purpose we are seeking here as the guiding principle in our inquiry.<sup>36</sup>

And:

There is therefore some activity specific to humanity as a whole, for which the whole human race in all its vast number of human beings is designed; and no single person, or *household*, or *small community*, or *city*, or *individual kingdom* can fully achieve.<sup>37</sup>

Dante is very precisely alluding to his illustrious predecessors in political theory. The social groupings that he mentions are the household (Aristotle's "family"); the small community (Aristotle's "village"); the city (Aristotle's city-state); the kingdom (Aquinas's province or kingdom). But the key here is that Dante pointedly indicates that his predecessors have failed to imagine "the best purpose of all," the polity's highest *telos* and truly perfect nature. They have not reached the *end*, the *final cause*, of political thought pronounced by Dante's "finally, the best purpose of all." They have failed to recognize the true natural limits of the state.

The whole premise of Dante's *Monarchy* is that there is a fundamental flaw in Aristotelian-Thomist political theory, which brings the life of the state to a premature end before it ever comes to possess its true nature, the attainment of its *telos*. By setting the limits of the *polis* at the extent of the city (Aristotle) or the kingdom (Aquinas), Dante's predecessors are themselves, on this issue at least, sodomites. For sodomy is, in essence, *the unnatural delimitation of the boundaries of the community*. Sodomy is a contraceptive political ideology that prevents the growing *polis* from reaching its natural end.

Aristotle and Aquinas accept that, from the perspective of those who count themselves as "us," as members of a common polity, there will always be others who count as "foreigners," "enemies," "aliens"—external groupings against whom "we" will necessarily be pitted. We see this, for instance, in Aquinas's offhand remark (cited above) that the province surpasses the city "because of the need for common defense and

mutual aid against enemies.” Aristotelian-Thomist political theory allows for the perennial persistence of inter-community violence. This may well be a realistic and even accurate assessment of actual political affairs—but it is not Dante’s. We may regard Dante as naive or utopian; we may not share his vision for a number of reasons; but we must recognize his vision for what it is: a full-fledged commitment to a project for world peace. Daring to imagine world peace, Dante urges us to deny the inevitability of inter-community violence. His solution is a polity in which, because it is all-inclusive, we can no longer see *any* others as enemies or aliens—a polity which will have rendered literally unthinkable the crimes of the men of Sodom. In Dante’s *Monarchy*, social groupings can no longer draw distinctions between “us” and “them,” “native” and “alien,” can no longer fall prey to the sodomitic sin of overvaluing one’s own identity, can no longer find it natural to privilege the “homo” (the same) over the “hetero” (the other). Dante’s entire political vision is founded on his absolute conviction that any political boundary—between one party and another, one city and other, one nation and another, will always end up in violence.

### **Cosmopolitanism**

Dante’s political program calls for the unification of all humankind under the direction of a single ruler:

Now it is agreed that the whole of mankind is ordered to one goal, as has already been demonstrated: there must therefore be one person who directs and rules mankind, and he is properly called “Monarch” or “Emperor.” And thus it is apparent that the well-being of the world requires that there be a monarchy or empire.<sup>38</sup>

To us, these words sound dangerous, as if they promote some sort of totalitarian nationalism or imperialism. We think of a “monarch” as one who rules over a nation, and we think of “empire” as a nation gone crazy with arrogant colonizing expansionism. For us, an “emperor” is one who elevates his own nation above all others.

There is a passage in *Monarchy* that appears to confirm Dante’s allegiance to this most distasteful brand of imperialism, in which the world is subjected to the domination of the “master race”:

On this question, I therefore affirm that it was by right, and not by usurping, that the Roman people took on the office of the monarch (which is called “empire”) over all men. This can be proved firstly as follows: *it is appropriate that the noblest race should rule over all the others*; the Roman people was the noblest; therefore it was appropriate that they should rule over all the others.<sup>39</sup>

We can readily imagine someone citing this passage as evidence that Dante epitomizes the racism of his age. But in fact Dante’s *Monarch* only qualifies for the position by a cosmopolitan renunciation of self-interest, including the interest of his own particular nation, people, and race.

In *Monarchy* Dante presents Aeneas, “father of the Roman people,” as the exemplary Monarch. He merits this exalted status not only on account of his own virtuous deeds, but also because “nobility flowed into him by hereditary right.” Aeneas was biologically destined to exercise global hegemony. Again, this might be taken as a profoundly disturbing endorsement of a race-based right to rule—were it not that Dante in fact aims to debunk the fiction of race. For what makes Aeneas “racially superior” is nothing other than his absolute racial cosmopolitanism. Neither exclusively Asian, European, nor African, Aeneas is descended from all regions of the globe:

As far as hereditary nobility is concerned, we find that each of the three regions into which the world is divided [i.e. Asia, Europe, Africa] made him noble, both through his ancestors and through his wives. For *Asia* did so through his more immediate forebears, such as Assaracus and the others who ruled over Phrygia, a region of Asia. . . . *Europe* did so with his most ancient forebear, i.e., Dardanus; *Africa* did so with his most ancient female forebear Electra, daughter of King Atlas of great renown. . . . That Atlas came from Africa is confirmed by the mountain there which bears his name.<sup>40</sup>

This pan-global ancestry is shared by Aeneas’ wives as well, so that, in the blood of his Roman progeny, none of the three regions of the world will predominate:

In similar fashion I find that he was also made noble by marriage. For his first wife, Creusa, the daughter of the king Priam, was from *Asia*, as may be gathered from what was said earlier. . . . His second wife was Dido, queen and mother of the Carthaginians in *Africa*. . . . The third was Lavinia, mother of the Albans and the Romans, the daughter of King Latinus and his heir as well. . . . This last wife was from Italy, the most noble region of *Europe*. When these facts . . . are borne

in mind, who is not satisfied that the father of the Roman people, and as a consequence that people itself, was the noblest in the world?<sup>41</sup>

The fact that Aeneas is not racially pure is what makes him most noble “racially.” Because of his ethnic cosmopolitanism, none of the earth’s geographically identified peoples can claim authority or nobility based on their ethnic identity. Having world-wide genealogical roots, and being the product of a divinely willed “double confluence [i.e., on both the paternal and the maternal side] of blood from every part of the world into a single man,”<sup>42</sup> Aeneas is not the special representative, advocate or protector of any particular *gens* (people, family, race, nation, stock, or tribe).

Let us note in passing that if Aeneas’s cosmopolitanism makes him worthy to hold global political power, the Catholic Church’s provincialism (I am speaking not of the modern-day institution but rather of Dante’s sense of the institution as a reality in his own era) is among those qualities that render it entirely unworthy of any political role. For Dante, who regards the Church as protecting the self-interest of a certain small portion of Europeans, notes with approval that most citizens of the globe vehemently resist the idea of being governed by the Church: “And who can doubt that it [i.e., the Church] did not receive it [i.e., authority to govern] from the consent of all men or of the most exceptional among them, given that not only all Asians and Africans, but also the greater part of those who live in Europe find the idea abhorrent?”<sup>43</sup>

We see that, with the figure of Aeneas, Dante invokes the notion of nobility based on biological heredity—but he does so only in order to undermine the usual logic of genealogy. More often he outright denies that “bloodlines” play any role whatsoever in determining the virtue or nobility of individuals. For instance, the gist of the *Convivio*’s lengthy treatment of the question is that biologically determined nobility pertains only to the individual, not to his or her *gens*. That is, God creates certain individual humans who are born more noble than others, but He never creates a “race” or a “stock” naturally superior to any other: “For the divine seed falls not upon the race, that is the stock, but falls upon individuals and, as will be demonstrated, the stock does not ennoble individuals but vice-versa.”<sup>44</sup>

The *Comedy*’s major spokesperson for Dante’s critique of biological racialism is the troubadour poet Sordello, who guides Dante and Virgil in



an early stage of their ascent of Mt. Purgatory. Sordello qualifies for this role partly on the basis of his didactic poem *Ensenhamen d'onor*, which stands as the source of Dante's insistence that *gens* is no factor in determining nobility:

per qu'es tot, qui que plaza o tire,  
en noble cor, qui'n vol ver dire,  
lo ben que on fai tota via,  
de qualche gen que mogutz sia.  
Donx non pot om dir que noblesa  
mova de sola gentillesa,  
quel gentilz es soven malvatz,  
e'l borges valens e presatz;  
pero nobles cors e gentils  
es de totz bos faiz segnorils.<sup>45</sup>

And so, whether you like it or not,  
The good one does all down the line depends  
On a noble heart—if you want to tell the truth—  
No matter what people [*gen*] one stems from.  
And therefore one cannot say that nobility  
Stems from aristocratic birth alone,  
For the aristocrat is often evil,  
And the commoner excellent and fine.  
And so a noble, gentle heart  
Is the true sire of all good deeds.

Sordello's role in the *Comedy* is to present this very thought—that one has an equal opportunity to virtue and nobility *de qualche gen que mogutz sia*, “no matter what people one stems from.”

In *Purgatory* 7 Sordello informs Dante and Virgil that it is not possible to continue the ascent after nightfall. As night is approaching, the three agree to find a suitable place to take their rest; Sordello proposes to lead them to the upper edge of a valley, from where they will enjoy a panoramic view of several souls who promise to be of interest to Dante. Thus begins the episode known as the “Valley of the Princes,” consisting largely of Sordello's pointing out and remarking upon the qualities of numerous royal aristocrats from throughout Europe. The primary theme of Sordello's discourse is that of genealogical rupture: using the metaphors associated with “the family tree” (seed, branches, etc.), he points to several instances in which an apparently noble “trunk” has produced rotten or

ignoble “fruit.” He shows (in the words of Sordello’s own poem that I just cited above) that *gentilz es soven malvatz*, “the aristocrat is often evil.” Ottakar II of Bohemia, for instance, was a better person as a baby than was his son in his maturity: “ne le fasce / fu meglio assai che Vincislao suo figlio / barbuto” (7.100–102). Phillip III of France is pierced with grief at the thought of the wicked life led by his son, Phillip IV (109–11). These and several other cases are meant to show that no special value or virtue is ever passed down by one’s *gens*—that genetics, paternity, ancestry, biological hereditary, family, race, people, stock, nation, tribe are all utterly irrelevant to the determination of human superiority, which lies instead in virtuous deeds and the individual’s “nobility of heart.” Sordello sums up the point of his discourse as follows:

Rade volte risurge per li rami  
l’umana probitate; e questo vole  
quei che la dà, perché da lui si chiami.  
(*Purg.* 7.121–123)

As does the *Convivio*, Sordello’s Valley of the Princes speech teaches that virtue and nobility are gifts granted by God’s grace to *individuals*, never to a *gens* or genealogy as such.

It is significant that the encounter with Sordello surrounds Dante’s lengthy first-person digression concerning the urgent need for Empire or Monarchy (“Ahi, serva Italia,” *Purg.* 6.76–151). Dante recognizes the importance—lest the notion be misunderstood—of disassociating “Empire” from any connotations of nationalist, racial, or ethnic hegemony. That is why Dante’s personal call for Monarchy is bound up with Sordello’s critique of the logic of the “bloodline.”

The little introductory details describing the physical setting of the Valley of the Princes are not merely ornamental but rather contribute to our sense of the episode’s larger significance. It is a place marked both by brilliant diversity and fusion into unity, as the many bouquets of its multicolored flora come together as something new:

Oro e argento fine, cocco e biacca,  
indaco, legno lucido e sereno,  
fresco smeraldo in l’ora che si fiacca,  
da l’erba e da li fior, dentr’ a quel seno  
posti, ciascun saria di color vinto,  
come dal suo maggiore è vinto il meno.

Non avea pur natura ivi dipinto,  
ma di soavità di mille odori  
vi faceva uno incognito e indistinto.  
'*Salve, Regina*' in sul verde e 'n su' fiori  
quindi seder cantando anime vidi,  
che per la valle non parean di fuori.  
(*Purg.* 7.73–84)

This fusion of diversity into unity is not the assimilation of otherness to a unit that is already there; it is, rather, the novel coming-to-be of a previously unrecognized wholeness. This is not the forced conversion of difference into the pre-existing identity of the Imperialist; it is, rather, the letting-emerge from diversity an unforeseen and unpredictable wholeness. The physical ambience of the Valley of the Princes presents an alternative model to that offered by the ideology of paternal genealogy: here difference does not demand divisions and partitions, and mingling together is not a threat to identity.

Just as the physical description of the Valley helps ground our understanding of Sordello's discourse, so do the particulars of the hymn that the Valley's souls are singing, the *Salve Regina*:

Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy  
our life, our sweetness, and our hope.  
To thee we cry, poor banished *children of Eve*.  
To thee we send up our sighs, mourning  
and weeping *in this valley*.<sup>46</sup>

It is not just that the collective voice of this song is set in "this valley" that makes it appropriate as the soundtrack to the Valley of the Princes. More importantly, these famous fathers are singing *as children*; and, even more, as *children of Eve*—that is, as *children of a common mother*. They have come to see themselves as scions of an extended family that includes all of humanity. In Purgatory these aristocrats who in life basked in the glory of their royal bloodlines now have come to acknowledge that pride in paternal genealogy is without foundation.

But the full significance of the Sordello episode only begins to appear when we recognize that Dante wants us to see him as a "positive type" of one of the great negative figures of Hell, the memorable Ghibelline aristocrat Farinata. There are a number of textual parallels that draw together these two ultimately in order to contrast them. They both appear,

initially at least, as aloof and imposing presences—both are called “disdainful.”<sup>47</sup> They are both first noticed by Virgil, who in both cases directs Dante’s attention to them with the phrase *vedi là*.<sup>48</sup> They are both stirred from their aloofness upon hearing words evocative of their homeland (Farinata is engaged by the sound of Dante’s Tuscan speech, Sordello by hearing Virgil say “Mantua”).<sup>49</sup> In both cases the *Comedy* suddenly interrupts their conversation with a lengthy digression, after which it is just as suddenly resumed. Most significantly, the very first words spoken by each, formulated as exactly parallel constructions, refer to the geographical provenance of their interlocutors (Farinata to Dante: “O Tosco”; Sordello to Virgil: “O Mantoano”).<sup>50</sup> At stake in the comparison of the two figures is a question concerning one’s native place.

Farinata, even in Hell, is driven by the mania that makes sense of the world by dividing people into “us” and “them.” He only first pays any heed to Dante upon recognizing from his speech that he must be a Tuscan—that is to say, “one of us.” But this is not enough, for Farinata needs to know if Dante is *really* “one of us”—one of the *real* Tuscans. He needs to know Dante’s ancestry:

Com’ io al piè de la sua tomba fui,  
guardommi un poco, e poi, quasi sdegnoso,  
mi dimandò: “Chi fuor li maggior tui?”  
Io ch’era d’ubidir desideroso,  
non gliel celai, ma tutto gliel’ apersi;  
ond’ ei levò le ciglia un poco in suso;  
poi disse: “Fieramente furo avversi  
a me e a miei primi e a mia parte,  
sì che per due fiate li dispersi.”

(*Inf.* 10.40–48)

Taking pride in his ancestry is part and parcel of Farinata’s character as one who overvalues his own identity and who sees everything through the prism of the opposition of self and other. This arch-egotism is forcefully condensed in a single verse: “a me e a miei primi e a mia parte.” With sworn allegiance to his Tuscan language, his family, his party and his homeland, Farinata is an exemplary sodomite: in his eyes, others are either with him or against him.

Farinata exhibits the classic elements of a “nationalist” ideology. For along with his concern for genealogical identity, he ascribes to the notion of a solid natural bond between language and *patria*:

“O Tosco che per la città del foco  
vivo ten vai così parlando onesto,  
piacciati di restare in questo loco.

La tua loquela ti fa manifesto  
di quella nobil patrïa natio,  
a la qual forse fui troppo molesto.”

(*Inf.* 10.22–27)

As we shall see presently, it is precisely this linkage of land and language, and this emphasis on “native” (*natio*) identity, which Sordello resists.

At first sight Sordello’s engagement with Virgil seems simply to repeat the episode of Farinata’s engagement with Dante. In both cases one who has until then been aloof, even disdainful, suddenly turns sympathetic in the presence of another whom he recognizes as a compatriot:

Pur Virgilio si trasse a lei, pregando  
che ne mostrasse la miglior salita;  
e quella non rispuose al suo dimando,  
ma di nostro paese e de la vita  
ci ’nchiese; e ’l dolce duca incominciava  
“Mantüa . . .,” e l’ombra, tutta in sé romita,  
surse ver’ lui del loco ove pria stava,  
dicendo: “O Mantoano, io son Sordello  
de la tua terra!”; e l’un l’altro abbracciava.

(*Purg.* 6.67–75)

But there is a difference. First, it is enough in Sordello’s eyes that the unknown stranger be a Mantuan—*any* Mantuan. He is not concerned with ancestry, not compelled to distinguish between those who are *real* compatriots and those who are not. More importantly, we note that Sordello’s sympathy is triggered by Virgil’s mention of Mantua, without any suggestion that Virgil speaks “Mantuan.” Farinata needed to hear Dante’s Tuscan speech before it became “manifest” to him that Dante was a Tuscan. For Sordello, who does not rely upon language as an indicator of homeland, a Mantuan is one who identifies himself as such—regardless of which language he may happen to speak. The solid bond of language and *patria* is loosened—for Sordello knows better than anyone else that there is no one-to-one correspondence between a place and a language.

Sordello knows this from his own linguistic experience. For the single most relevant fact about the historical Sordello is that he was the most famous of the native Italian poets who chose to write in Occitan—the

literary *koine* of the troubadours. Dante selected Sordello to serve as the antitype to the linguistic nationalist Farinata above all because he embodies the cosmopolitan renunciation of one's native speech.

When Sordello eventually learns that he has met up with not just any Mantuan, but the illustrious Virgil, he does speak of their sharing a common language, "la lingua nostra." But this turns out to be a poetic language that cannot be identified as specially belonging to a particular place:

"O gloria d'i Latin," disse, "per cui  
mostrò ciò che potea la lingua nostra,  
o pregio eterno del loco ond' io fui"  
(*Purg.* 7.16–18)

Land and language are both invoked here, but not in a manner that would suggest any linkage between a certain tongue and a certain place. Virgil's Latin language has nothing special to do with Virgil's identity as a native Mantuan. Where Farinata had combined one's speech and one's status as a "native" (*natio*) of the "noble fatherland" (*nobil patria*) into a single nationalist concept, Sordello for his part separates the two elements: he is proud that Virgil hailed from his home town, and he is proud to share with Virgil a powerful tongue. But this tongue—whatever it is—cannot be construed as the tongue of their native homeland. Farinata's pride in Tuscan, a particular provincial dialect, is supplanted by Sordello's homage to "our tongue," a tongue which seems to have a certain universal or cosmopolitan reach. But what exactly is "our tongue"? It cannot be Mantuan or Italian, since Virgil's literary excellence was achieved in Latin. But it cannot in fact be Latin, a language that Sordello neither spoke nor wrote. Nor can it be Sordello's Occitan, since Virgil of course knew nothing of that language. If Sordello is not thinking of "our tongue" as referring to "poetic language" in general (indeed a possibility), then he must have in mind the romance languages as a whole, all of the various languages and dialects that have a linguistic relation to Latin. "Our language," then, is for Sordello a transnational, transcultural, transhistorical idiom. He conceives of language as something other than any particular language employed by a specific historical people. Like Dante's "illustrious vernacular," it is language conceived of as rising above any fixation to a circumscribed geographical locus.

Farinata and Sordello both love their native place. Sordello values his homeland, but in a healthy manner, without any hint of the nationalist

overvaluation—which binds place with blood and language—that we find manifest in Farinata's devotion to his ancestry and to his status as *natio*, a native of the *nobil patria*. Sordello, who left Italy to circulate around the courts of Europe, is the citizen of the world: he willingly leaves behind both his native language and his native land. Dante celebrates Sordello above all for the fact that he renounces the notion that "his own" is necessarily best.

Our understanding of Sordello's significance in the *Comedy* is confirmed by a passage in *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, where Dante praises the Italian troubadour as one who dared to turn away from the familiar comforts of his native tongue:

Sordello has demonstrated this with respect to his native Mantua, which borders on Cremona, Brescia, and Verona; for he, a man of great eloquence, not only in the writing of poetry, but also in any number of other forms, *deserted the vernacular of his fatherland*.<sup>51</sup>

Even in Hell, Farinata remains devoted to the fatherland; Sordello, in life, had already outgrown the concept. If in Farinata's eyes Sordello would count as a "deserter," in Dante's eyes he is clearly a hero, one who debunks the myths of nationalist patriotism.

The *De Vulgari Eloquentia* confirms our sense that Brunetto Latini is, in Dante's eyes, to be reckoned among those who have not overcome excessive love for their own place. Brunetto stands as an example of the Tuscans, who are deluded into thinking their language is best:

Let us pass on from these peoples to the Tuscans who, infatuated in their madness, seem to want to claim for themselves the title of having the most illustrious vernacular. Not only does this pretension drive the common people mad; I have also known several famous men who have maintained it, such as Guittone d'Arezzo, [etc.] . . . and Brunetto [Latini] of Florence, whose writings, if there were time to examine them closely, would be found not to be curial, but *municipal*.<sup>52</sup>

Brunetto's ethnocentric "madness" is made manifest in a style that is merely "municipal": it may well appeal to compatriots from his own city-state, but it lacks the more universal appeal of the "courtly" language which Dante advocates, a language suitable to express "everything common to the whole and not peculiar to any part."<sup>53</sup>

In his classic treatment of the questions raised by Dante's condemning Brunetto Latini to Hell, André Pézard argues that Brunetto is not to be

counted as a sodomite but rather a blasphemer, and he concludes that Brunetto's blasphemy, unforgivable in Dante's eyes, was his decision to write the *Tresor* in French rather than Italian.<sup>54</sup> In Pézard's reading, Brunetto sealed his fate by "deserting the vernacular of his fatherland." But we must call into question Pézard's conclusion, since we have come to see that Dante, in his celebration of Sordello, endorses the attitude that would allow one to risk this very desertion. If Sordello is, in Dante's eyes, a hero for having renounced his native tongue, how can Brunetto be a villain for having done the same thing?

For Pézard, blasphemy means discontent with the natural gifts with which one has been endowed by God. Among these natural gifts is one's native vernacular language. To lack confidence in the quality of one's own language and homeland is nothing less than to call into question God's wisdom as the Creator. God had his reasons for creating things just as they are; to tamper with the existing order by, for instance, straying across linguistic boundaries, is to show profound contempt for God and nature.

Underlying Pézard's reading is an affirmation of national purity and sovereignty as the cornerstones of peace. He attributes to Dante the thought that those who share in common a mother tongue, those who resemble and are familiar with one another, those who practice identical customs, are naturally disposed to bond in contented coexistence. The peaceful *polis* is the homogeneous one. Introducing diversity into such a *polis* alters the conditions most favorable to a stable social order. Brunetto, deserting Italian for French, opens a wound in the naturally healthy nation, inviting an ever-growing contagion.

It is true that Aquinas, commenting on Aristotle, affirms that communities where resemblance and homogeneity rather than diversity and heterogeneity prevail are to be preferred, as being more conducive to political stability:

For it pertains to the statesman to know how large a city should be and whether it should include men of one nation or of several. The size of the city should indeed be such that the region may be sufficiently productive and that it may be possible to repel external enemies. It should also preferably be made up of a single nation in view of the fact that the men of the same nation possess the same way of life and the same customs, which foster friendship among the citizens because of their resemblance. Accordingly, the cities that were constituted out of different



nations were ruined on account of the dissensions that arose in them due to the diversity of manners, for one part used to ally itself with external enemies out of hatred for the other part.<sup>55</sup>

Aquinas (and P  zard follows him along this track) can only imagine friendship based on “resemblance”—on love for the Homo rather than the Hetero, for sameness rather than difference. But in Dante’s eyes this is surely a failure of the political imagination—not to mention the fact that Dante knew only too well how a “selfsame” city, in which everyone shares a mother tongue and identical customs, can be ripped apart by internal dissension and become the very crucible of violence.

P  zard envisions Dante’s Empire as the conglomeration or aggregation of discrete units that are racially and linguistically pure. On every level, the structure is a collection of such units that are themselves, within their own boundaries, homogeneous. The overall harmony of the whole is achieved through the compartmentalization or segregation of its parts:

The consequences of all this are enormous. God has willed that, since Nimrod, each human nation and each profession, each city and sometimes each neighborhood speak a different language. At the same time, He has willed that each of these various “communities,” from the smallest to the largest, join together to form, in their harmonious diversity, that universal monarchy which ought to cover the face of the earth. Forming an immense pyramid, families and corporations organize themselves into city-states, city-states into provinces, cities and kingdoms into the single Empire, whose goal is human happiness in this world, in preparation for eternal beatitude. This very diversity is necessary for unity, and corresponds to God’s designs. If, with indiscreet zeal, one of these “communities” or one of its members rejects its own language, which is the first and most indissoluble of the ties which bind one to his neighbors, then the harmony is broken and the structure falls into disorder. Thus, when the founding principle (shared native origins and shared language) is denied, the goal willed by God (universal peace and happiness) is ruined from the outset. Imagine the case of the sage who more than anyone else ought to persuade men to assemble as a civil society but who, in an abominable outrage, is the first to violate divine law by deserting his native tongue: how could he accomplish his divine mission, how could he make himself understood by his compatriots? . . . For each of us, our native language is a divine law. If, after Babel, the various corrupted human families each has its own language, none is entitled to transgress this new divine law by falling into an even greater corruption: adopting as more beautiful the speech of another race; this would be an offense against nature, comparable to that of a son who betrays his own parents out of love for a stranger/foreigner.<sup>56</sup>

It is true that Dante's Empire is a structure of unity and diversity. What is doubtful is that Dante placed any value on the homogeneity of the structure's building blocks. Pézard's global pyramid leaves no place for diversity *within* a particular community. The pyramid metaphor itself, with its connotations of static immobility, reveals the profoundly conservative gist of Pézard's view: everyone should remain fully satisfied with his native endowments. The rigidity of this structure prohibits the genealogical ruptures and linguistic border-crossings (Sordello's critique of racialism and his adoption of a foreign language) and the fluid miscegenation (Aeneas, whose "blood" is the product of a "confluence" of races; the fusion of the flowers of the Valley of Princes, which together make a new unity that is "incognito e indistinto") that Dante not only permits into his system but in fact celebrates as among its most cherished founding principles. Dante regards placing value on the Homo, (identity and resemblance) not as the cornerstone of peace but as the catalyst of discord. Pézard's prescription for peace—that each when faced with the attractions of "the stranger" should remain loyal to "his own"—is in fact the very essence of sodomy.

A striking passage from the *De Vulgari Eloquentia* tells us that in that text Dante had already begun to preach cosmopolitanism as the cure for the ethnocentric madness represented by Tuscans such as Farinata and Brunetto Latini. For he mocks those who are blinded by love for their own city:

In this, as well as in many other cases, Petramala [i.e., a relatively insignificant place in the eyes of most of the world] is the most important city and the "home town" of the greater part of the children of Adam. For whoever is so beneath contempt in his reasoning as to believe the place of his birth to be the most delightful under the sun attributes the same preeminence as well to his own vernacular, that is, his mother tongue, against all others, and consequently believes that his own native language was the same as Adam's. *I, on the other hand, have the world as my native land* as a fish has the sea; and although I drank from the Arno before I had teeth, and although I have loved Florence so much that I have suffered exile unjustly for my love, I support the shoulders of my judgment on reason rather than on sense impressions. And even if there exists no place in the world more in accord with my delight or with the repose of my senses than Florence, in reading over the volumes of the poets and of other writers in which the world is described totally and in its parts, and in considering within myself the situations of the various places in the world and their arrangements in relation to either pole and to the equator, I have decided and firmly believe that *there are*

many regions as well as cities both more noble and more delightful than Tuscany and Florence where I was born and a citizen, and that there are many nations and peoples who use a language more delightful and useful than the Latins.<sup>57</sup>

Happy to proclaim that Florence is not the center of the world and that the Romance languages are not the world's best, Dante here first establishes his full credentials as a cosmopolitan Hetero open to the appeal of otherness. This is not, as P  zard's argument would have it, the blasphemy of a "son who betrays his own parents out of love for a stranger." Rather, it is evidence that Dante's experience as an exile has given him insight into the wisdom of Lot—he who would risk sacrificing his own daughters for the sake of the strangers.

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## NOTES

1. All citations of the *Commedia* are from Giorgio Petrocchi, ed. *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata* (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1966–1967).

2. For an excellent and concise discussion of Dante's attitude toward homosexuality, emphasizing that in *Purgatory* homoerotic desire is not deemed "unnatural," see Joseph Pequigney's entry on "Sodomy" in *The Dante Encyclopedia*, ed. Richard Lansing (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000), 788–89. For a more expansive treatment, see Pequigney's "Sodomy in Dante's *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*," *Representations* 36 (1991): 22–42.

3. I feel justified in treating "art" and "poetry" as synonyms for several reasons: first, because Virgil appears to be addressing Dante personally when speaking of "your art"—which in Dante's case is obviously poetry; secondly, because the tradition of aesthetic theory instigated by Plato often uses these terms interchangeably (in the *Republic*, Plato illustrates his theory of poetry by drawing analogies from visual arts); thirdly, because I mean by "poetry" something more than versified language, so that "poetry" functions as the general name for the various acts of creative artistry.

4. Aristotle, *Physics* 2.8.199b; trans. *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Vol. 1, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 341.

5. The relation between "poetry" and "nature" is one of the primary themes of my book, *The Ethics of Nature in the Middle Ages: On Boccaccio's Poetaphysics* (New York: St. Martin's, 1998).

6. Aristotle, *Physics* 3.1. 200b; trans. *The Complete Works*. Vol. 1, 342.

7. It should be noted that the medieval definition of sodomy includes all sexual acts in which semen is emitted in a manner that does not lead to procreation (e.g., male masturbation, oral copulation, heterosexual anal sex, etc.). Aquinas insists that "the emission of semen . . . should be accomplished in a manner befitting the end for which it is needed." *Summa Theologica* 2–2, q. 153, a. 3; trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, *The Summa of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Benzinger Brothers, Inc., 1947).

8. For the reference to *tokos* and to the Thomist-Aristotelian tradition on usury, see Robert Durling's commentary in his edition of *Inferno* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 183.

9. Aristotle, *Politics* 1.11.1258b; trans. *The Complete Works*, Vol. 2, 1997; emphases added.

10. Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Politics*, 1.8.134; trans. from Charles S. Singleton, *The Divine Comedy, Vol. 1 Inferno, Part II, Commentary* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 182.

11. Mark D. Jordan, in his excellent book *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), remarks that Peter Damien's *Book of Gomorrah* criticizes sodomy as being a desire for sameness rather than difference; the sodomite will find nothing in his partner that he cannot find in himself: "The 'miserable' Sodomite is so blinded by the fury of self-indulgence . . . that he does what no buck, ram, stallion, bull, or even ass would do. And what kind of desire can this be? Every natural desire seeks to find outside what it does not find within. *Every natural desire is desire for difference*. What can one man find in another that he cannot find in himself? 'If then you have a craving for the feel of male flesh, turn your hand to yourself and know that whatever you do not find in yourself, you will seek vainly in another man's body'" (55, emphasis added). For more on the medieval understanding of homosexuality as the aversion to difference, with particular reference to Alain de Lille's *Plaint of Nature*, see my *The Ethics of Nature*, 195–96. For an excellent history and critique of modern and postmodern views of homosexuality as aversion to difference, see Jonathan Dollimore, "Homophobia (2): Theories of Sexual Difference," in his *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 249–75.

12. Martin Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 14.

13. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* 2.45.6; trans. J. F. Anderson, *Summa contra gentiles*. Vol. 2 (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975).

14. At the very opening of *Defensor pacis*, Dante's contemporary, the political theorist Marsilius of Padua, cites a passage from Cassiodorus, the gist of which is that the purpose of the peaceful state is the "increase of the race," in the sense of an "enhancement of their customs"—i.e., a multiplication-as-diversification: "Tranquility, wherein peoples prosper and the welfare of nations is preserved, must certainly be desirable to every state. For it is the noble mother of the good arts. Permitting the steady increase of the race of mortals, it extends their powers and enhances their customs" (*Defensor pacis* 1.1.1; trans. from Marsilius of Padua, *The Defender of Peace (The Defensor Pacis)*, trans. Alan Gewirth (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 3). "Increase," here, is not merely quantitative; rather, it is an "advance," an alteration in the natures of human beings.

15. *Tresor* 1.1.4; trans. mine, from *Li Livres Dou Tresor de Brunetto Latini*, ed. Francis J. Carmody (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1948), 17.

16. *Ibid.*, 3.2.2; *Li Livres*, 319.

17. *Ibid.*, 3.1.5; *Li Livres*, 318.

18. *Ibid.*, 3.1.8; *Li Livres*, 318.

19. *Il Tesoretto*, 186–96; emphases added. Text from *Il Tesoretto*, ed. J. B. Holloway (New York: Garland, 1981), 12–13.

20. Dante Della Terza points out some of these textual allusions in his "The Canto of Brunetto Latini," in *Inferno: A Canto-by-Canto Commentary*, ed. Allen Mandelbaum, Anthony Oldcorn, and Charles Ross (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 197–212.

21. We should also bear in mind a structural parallel that reinforces our sense that Brunetto functions as Dante's father: this canto—the fifteenth of *Inferno*—is paired with the fifteenth canto of *Paradiso*, where Dante encounters another "father-figure" of much importance, his great-great grandfather Cacciaguida. Dante casts the homosexual Brunetto in the role of progenitor.

22. *Summa Theologica* 2–2, q. 153, a. 2–3; trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, *The Summa of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Benzinger Brothers, Inc., 1947).

23. "Condemnation of 219 Propositions," trans. Ernest L. Fortin and Peter D. O'Neill, in *Medieval Political Philosophy*, ed. Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963), 351.

24. *Tresor* 3.1.12; trans. mine, from *Li Livres*, 318.

25. As Durling remarks in the extended note on "Dante and Homosexuality" in his translation of the *Inferno*, "it is difficult not to read Cantos 15 and 16 as an acknowledgement that Dante had felt [homosexual] desires" (559). On Dante's representing Brunetto as "queer," see Michael Camille,

"The Pose of the Queer: Dante's Gaze, Brunetto Latini's Body," in Glenn Burger and Steven Kruger, eds., *Queering the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 57–86.

26. Jordan amply demonstrates that the Old Testament story of the punishment of Sodom was not read in the early Middle Ages primarily as a condemnation of same-sex desire; in fact the issue of homosexuality was not a prominent feature of early medieval exegesis of the episode. Jordan's book traces the process by which a "complicated and disturbing story was simplified until it became the story of the punishment of a single sin" (29). For an excellent, very detailed treatment of the Old Testament narrative, see Richard Kay, *Dante's Swift and Strong: Essays on "Inferno" XV* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1978), 209–266 ("Chapter 8: 'The Image of Sodom: Old Testament'"). As Kay says (217): "Manifestly the point at issue between Lot and his fellow Sodomites is not their sexual mores but rather their obligations to strangers who have been accepted as guests! The Sodomites maintain that they are governed by no law other than their own custom, and Lot's appeal to the common law of hospitality especially outrages them."

27. As Kay says: "Abram unselfishly aids the Sodomites in their distress, but they, in turn, are thoroughly xenophobic. . . . Abraham welcomes strangers, as does Lot, but the citizens of Sodom assault travelers and compel them to conform to the customs of the place" (220).

28. *Il Tesoretto*, 164–79; emphases added. Text from Holloway, 10.

29. Probably the most valuable demonstration that Brunetto's sin is his "Guelphism" is Kay's "The Sin of Brunetto Latini," Chapter One of his *Dante's Swift and Strong* (3–23). There are some obvious similarities between my approach to the question and Kay's—most notably, the notion that Guelph political ideology is, in Dante's view, "against nature." But Kay understands this somewhat differently than I do here. For Kay, what is "unnatural" about Guelphs is that they do not respect the "natural order of things" in which local nobility are naturally subordinate to the emperor; their sin is their promotion of "class warfare": "The nobles themselves were to blame. Had they remained loyal to their traditional moral and political values, the greed of the ignoble would have been restrained by the emperor and his natural allies, the local nobility. Instead the Guelph nobles had allied with the people and brought about the destruction both of the emperor's authority and their own class. What led them to upset the *natural hierarchy* of authority wherein the emperor rules the nobles and the nobles rule the people? . . . To gain distinction for themselves and their city, the Guelph nobles had perverted the *natural political structure*, which for Dante was the foundation of human peace, justice, virtue, happiness" (15; emphases added). Kay sees the "crime against nature" as the rejection of the hierarchical social stratifications which make for a "natural" and stable polity. I am emphasizing that the "crime against nature" is not so much against the old hierarchical social order as it is against a polity *yet-to-come*, the polity of the future, the global Monarchy. And the "nature" that Guelphism perverts is not a fixed social class stratification but rather the natural boundaries of the *polis*—of which, for Dante, there should rightly (and "naturally") be *none*. For another suggestive reading emphasizing that Brunetto's Guelphism is "unnatural," see Susan Noakes, "From Other Sodomites to Fraud," in *Lectura Dantis: Inferno*, ed. Allen Mandelbaum, Anthony Oldcorn, and Charles Ross (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 213–24. Noakes falters a bit, in my view, when she says that the "violence to nature" done by Guelphism is its erroneous view of "human nature," which is such that it cannot be persuaded by political rhetoric to construct the peaceful state (220). For Noakes, Guelphism is "unnatural" simply because it does not know the truth about "human nature" (it does not know that humans cannot be persuaded to act well). Dante is in fact much more specific about Guelphism's "violence to nature": in its allegiance to the city, it unnaturally restricts the boundaries of the polity. For a history of the "Sodomites-as-Guelphs" interpretation, which dates back at least to the early seventeenth century, see André Pézard's classic treatment of Dante's Brunetto and of *Inferno* XV, *Dante sous la pluie de feu* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1950), 38ff. P(zard, for his part, rejects this interpretation.

30. *Monarchy* 1.9.3; trans. from *Monarchy*, ed. Prue Shaw (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 13–14.

31. *Politics* 1.2 1252a; trans. *The Complete Works*. Vol. 2, 1986.

32. *Ibid.* 1.2 1252b–1253a; trans. *The Complete Works*. Vol. 2, 1987.

33. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Politics*, trans. Ernest L. Fortin and Peter D. O'Neill, in Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi, eds., *Medieval Political Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), 308–09; emphases added.
34. Thomas Aquinas, *On Kingship* 1; trans. and ed. Paul E. Sigmund, *St. Thomas Aquinas on Politics and Ethics* (New York, W. W. Norton & Co., 1988), 16–17; emphases added.
35. *Monarchy* 1.1.5; trans. Shaw, 4.
36. *Ibid.* 1.1.2; trans. Shaw, 6; emphases added.
37. *Ibid.* 1.1.4; trans. Shaw, 6; emphases added.
38. *Ibid.* 1.5.8–9; trans. Shaw, 11.
39. *Ibid.* 2.3.2–3; trans. Shaw, 33–34; emphasis added.
40. *Ibid.* 2.3.9–13; trans. Shaw, 35.
41. *Ibid.* 2.3.14–17; trans. Shaw, 36–37.
42. *Ibid.* 2.3.17; trans. Shaw, 37.
43. *Ibid.* 3.14.7; trans. Shaw, 89.
44. *Convivio* 4.20.5; trans. mine.
45. Text from James J. Wilhelm, *The Poetry of Sordello* (New York: Garland, 1997).
46. Cited in Singleton, *Purgatorio*. Vol. 2 (“Commentary”), 147; emphases added.
47. Farinata is described as *quasi sdegnoso* (“as if disdainful”) in *Inf.* 10.41; Sordello is described as a soul that is *disdegnosa* (“disdainful”) in *Purg.* 6.62.
48. *Inf.* 10.32: *Vedi là Farinata*; *Purg.* 6.58: *Ma vedi là un'anima*.
49. *Inf.* 10.2–27; *Purg.* 6.71–75.
50. *Inf.* 10.22; *Purg.* 6.74.
51. *De Vulgari Eloquentia* 1.15.2; trans. Robert S. Haller, *Literary Criticism of Dante Alighieri* (Lincoln; University of Nebraska Press, 1973), 25; emphasis added.
52. *De Vulgari Eloquentia* 1.13.1; trans. Haller, 21–22; emphasis added.
53. *De Vulgari Eloquentia* 1.18.2; trans. Haller, 30.
54. Pézard, 95ff.
55. *Commentary on Aristotle's Politics* 3.2.362; trans. Ernest L. Fortin and Peter D. O'Neill, in *Medieval Political Philosophy*, ed. Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963), 318–19.
56. Pézard, 103.
57. *De Vulgari Eloquentia* 1.6.2–3; trans. Haller, 8–9; emphases added.

# Dante's *Inferno*, Jonathan Edwards, and New England Calvinism

KATHLEEN VERDUIN

"Dante! Night's and Hell's poet he."

Herman Melville, *Pierre* (1852)

In his Gothic novella *The Mist* (1985), Stephen King describes a fanatical fire-and-brimstone sermon as "a steady stream of horrors out of Doré, Bosch, and Jonathan Edwards" (139). As western culture's most famous iconographer of hell, Dante (invoked here by reference to the illustrations of Doré) has long been draped in Gothic—in 1816 Mary Shelley depicted Frankenstein's monster as "a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived" (46)—and parallels between the tale of terror and the kind of religious dread popularly exemplified by the late-Puritan minister Edwards have been amply explored (see Porte, Sage, Ingebretsen). But King's allusion serves also to reiterate a recurrent if now obscure association between Dante and Edwards that was precipitated by nineteenth-century New England religious controversy and forms a coherent episode in the American reception of the *Inferno*. Caught in an ongoing and often bitter debate between residual Calvinism and emergent Unitarianism (in New England the dominant forms of Protestant faith), the heirs of Puritanism contended with their ancestors as they appropriated literary texts: and the shade of Edwards dogged their reading of Dante at a contested nexus of sin and damnation. Even the institution of Dante studies by the end of the century—surely one of New England's proudest literary achievements—shows traces of this conflict at its roots.

### **“The hands of an angry God”: Edwards**

The pairing of Dante with Edwards arose from a tendentious reception of Edwards's theology that began to polarize almost immediately after his death. A towering intellect and pioneer in the study of religious psychology, Edwards (1703–1758) saw his career peak in the Great Awakening of the early 1740s, then plummet abruptly in the chagrin of its aftermath; his Northampton, Massachusetts, congregation dismissed him in 1750, leaving him to work among the Native American population in frontier Stockbridge. Belatedly appointed to the presidency of the College of New Jersey (Princeton), Edwards died from a smallpox inoculation before assuming office. Yale president Ezra Stiles opined in 1787 that “in another generation” Edwards would “pass into as transient notice as scarce above oblivion” (quoted in Marsden 498), but the theologian's prodigious *oeuvre* assured his continuing influence. Collected editions of his works appeared in 1808, 1829, and 1843; the Yale edition (1957–), now standard, runs to twenty-four volumes. In the century or so after his death, however, Edwards's reputation rested chiefly on two treatises composed during the Stockbridge period: *A Careful and Strict Enquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions of that Freedom of the Will, Which is Supposed to be Essential to Moral Agency, Virtue and Vice, Reward and Punishment, Praise and Blame* (1754); and, second, *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended* (1758). Both were from their inception polemical, drafted in reaction against the English liberal John Taylor's *Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin, Proposed to a Free and Candid Examination* (1740).

Intended, as his recent biographer George Marsden observes, as part of Edwards's “grand design to reestablish Calvinism's international intellectual respectability” (436), these two works proved especially useful as post-Puritan theologians wrestled with issues Edwards had brilliantly addressed: original sin, human depravity, and divine election (the Calvinist doctrine that God predestined souls to salvation or damnation). In the face of an encroaching religion of rationalism, New England Calvinists of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries clutched these doctrines as crucial, provoking Dr. William Ellery Channing (1780–1842), among the most eloquent apologists for the rising tide of Unitarianism, to repudiate in a manifesto sermon of 1819 “that system which arrogates to itself the name of Orthodoxy”:



According to its old and genuine form, it teaches that God brings us into life wholly depraved, so that under the innocent features of childhood is hidden a nature averse to all good and propense to all evil, a nature which exposes us to God's displeasure and wrath. . . . This system also teaches that God selects from this corrupt mass a number to be saved, and plucks them, by a special influence, from the common ruin; that the rest of mankind, though left without that special grace which their conversion requires, are commanded to repent, under penalty of aggravated woe; and that forgiveness is promised to them on terms which their very constitution infallibly disposes them to reject, and in rejecting which they awfully enhance the punishments of hell. These proffers of forgiveness and exhortations of amendment, to beings born under a blighting curse, fill our minds with a horror which we want words to express. (*Works* 377)

Historian Mark A. Noll describes American Unitarianism in its early days as "an extension of the liberalizing religion of an earlier Enlightenment rationalism [John Taylor's intellectual context]. As such, it represented a continuation of theological influence from eighteenth-century refined English thought—trust in reason instead of the practice of enthusiasm, belief in salvation by moral amelioration instead of by a bloody sacrifice, hope for the universal salvation of all people instead of a craven fear of hell. . . . Unitarians promoted a benevolent God, a balanced universe, and a sublime human potential" (284). While expressing a filial respect for Edwards, Channing accordingly regretted his predecessor's "vassalage to a false theology" (*Works* 128). Self-identified disciples of Edwards, meanwhile—among them Samuel Hopkins (1721–1803), Joseph Bellamy (1719–1790), and Nathanael Emmons (1745–1840)—attempted to shore up a foundering Calvinism through desperate theological acrobatics, driven finally by the logic of their premises to propose God as the author of sin and the cosmic drama of salvation or damnation as merely, in Bellamy's awestruck conception, a setting for divine self-display: "the grand stage of action and scene of all God's wonderful works, till the day of judgment" (55). Whether or not we agree with Joseph Haroutunian's conviction, expressed in 1932, that "the history of the New England Theology is the history of a degradation" (xxii), it is undeniable that Calvinist *disputatio* turned increasingly to the divisive question of hell: among the titles in this war of words were Hopkins, *An Inquiry Concerning the Future State of Those Who Die in Their Sins* (1783); Jonathan Edwards, Jr., *The Salvation of All Men Strictly Examined* (1824); Walter Balfour, *Letters on the Immortality of the Soul* (1829); Edward Tyler, *Lectures on Future Punishment*

(1830); and Emmons, *The Plea of Sinners against Endless Punishment* (undated). In Calvinist thinking, hell functioned at the very least as a necessary corollary to heaven: Moses Stuart of Andover Seminary, founded in protest when the Hollis Professorship of Divinity at Harvard went to a Unitarian, Henry Ware, in 1805, stated firmly in his *Exegetical Essays on Several Works Relating to Future Punishment* (1830), "It does most plainly and indubitably follow that, if the Scriptures have not asserted the endless punishment of the wicked, neither have they asserted the endless happiness of the righteous, nor the endless glory and extent of the Godhead" (quoted in Frank Hugh Foster 335).

Given this foregrounding of eternal perdition in the religious culture of the early Republic, and the role awarded him as bearer of the best or worst in Calvinism, it is hardly surprising that the figure posthumously cut by Edwards was soon inseparable from what remains his most famous sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" (1741). Preached at Enfield, Connecticut, at the height of the Great Awakening and still a staple of American literature anthologies, where it was installed in the Menckenesque climate of the early twentieth century, the "spider sermon" transfixes by its terrifying imagery:

The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider or some loathsome insect, over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked; his wrath toward you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times so abominable in his eyes as the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours. (*Works* 22:411)

Biographers of Edwards have been at pains to deprecate this document as incidental; the magisterial historian Perry Miller, largely responsible for the academic rehabilitation of Edwards following the Second World War, dismissed Edwards's belief in hell as a "footnote" (149), and Edwards himself, who no doubt listened as his hearers emitted the "shreiks & crys" recorded by an eyewitness (quoted in *Works* 22:34), urged two years later "that there be the greatest caution used in comforting and establishing persons, as being safe and past dangers of hell" (*Works* 16:109). Current scholarship on Edwards, however, joins Henry F. May in accepting Edwards's doctrine of hell "not as a minor blemish in his intellectual system, but as essential to it" (24). As Norman Fiering points out in his study of Edwards's intellectual milieu, "Sinners in the Hands" outsold all of Edwards's American publications, with eight editions before the end of the

eighteenth century (200–204); according to M. X. Lesser, the same sermon was reprinted more than a dozen times during the nineteenth century, often for purposes of evangelism (5). The biography by Samuel Hopkins introducing the 1808 (“Worcester”) edition of Edwards’s works notes that “Sinners in the Hands” ranked high among sermons aimed to “awaken the conscience of the sinner” and had been “attended with remarkable impressions on many of the hearers” (52); the text is in fact occasionally still issued by religious publishing houses.

The enthusiastic consumption of the piece may testify as well to its sensationalism; like the similarly popular illustrated editions of the English Protestant John Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* (1563) or the New England Puritan Michael Wigglesworth’s poem *The Day of Doom* (1662), Edwards’s sermon could be argued to anticipate the Gothic novel. As Benjamin Trumbull’s 1818 *History of Connecticut* confirms, moreover, “Sinners in the Hands” constituted an historical event, an “extraordinary instance” (112), obviously much talked about and worthy of commemoration. Perhaps more significantly, the sermon was circulated inimically by the anti-Calvinist wing. In 1822, notably, the Rev. Andrews Norton (1786–1853), Dexter Professor of Sacred Literature at the by then thoroughly Unitarian Harvard Divinity School, inveighed against Calvinism in the liberal journal *The Christian Disciple* by citing Edwards’s sermon at some length, deploring Edwards as “wholly destitute of right conceptions of God, of proper affections toward Him, and of commiseration for the sufferings of his fellow-creatures” (201). In Donald Weber’s summation, “By the mid-nineteenth century Edwards appeared as the notorious preacher of hellfire—an object of execration, appropriation, and defense” (“Figure” 556).

### Edwards and Dante

Jonathan Edwards himself died a quarter of a century before the first English translations of Dante in the 1780s, and one can only speculate about what he might have made of Dante’s portrayal of hell. Though he decried the Catholic Middle Ages in his *History of Redemption* as the reign of Antichrist and “the darkest and most dismal day that ever the Christian church saw, and probably the darkest that ever it will see” (*Works* 9:409), he might well have approved Dante’s reputed antipapalism, as did Foxe in

the *Book of Martyrs* (see Caesar 42)—Nicholas Havely has traced Dante's surprising prominence in the religious polemic of the English Reformation—or like Dr. Johnson aligned the Florentine allegorist with John Bunyan (Boswell 2:238). New England men of letters born in the eighteenth century appropriated the *Inferno* with Augustan reserve: Channing (still too much the rationalist, perhaps, to respond strongly to medieval texts) remarked that writers of genius like Dante and Milton “excelled in their delineations of evil rather than of good” (quoted in Peabody 403), an assessment that sounds vaguely disapproving, and the *littérateur* and historian William H. Prescott (1796–1859), in an obligatory gesture mimicking English commentators such as William Hayley (120) and Thomas Warton (3:248–49), attributed the “bad taste” of the canticle to “the rudeness of the age in which Dante lived” (346). Rather surprisingly, since he was certainly capable of scarfing invective (his attack on Emerson's Divinity School Address in 1837 is only the best known example), Andrews Norton—among the first (along with his brother-in-law George Ticknor, who initiated Dante classes at Harvard) to promote serious study of the *Commedia* in America—left as far as I know no record of aversion to the *Inferno*, despite its potential resemblance to “Sinners in the Hands”; as a cultivated intellectual, eager to disseminate European literary opinion through his digest *Select Journal of Foreign Periodical Literature*, he approached the *Commedia* in imitation of philological methods modeled currently in Germany (see Turner 24–29). His son Charles Eliot Norton recalled that “the earliest of my own associations with Dante are connected with the friendly criticism and discussion” between his father and Thomas W. Parsons (1819–1892), whose translation of Dante progressed laboriously through most of the century (Norton, Preface vi).<sup>1</sup>

As K. P. Van Anglen has definitively shown, Dante's absorption into a Unitarian “republic of letters” was politicized from the outset as a salutary *translatio imperii et studii* (see especially 160–63), and in a sense Andrews Norton's endorsement was by itself enough to claim the *Commedia* as a Unitarian possession. Among those in a Calvinist tradition, on the other hand, Dante's elevation to literary prominence in nineteenth-century New England emerged in tandem with the totemic projection of Edwards, and Dante could consequently be read by choice or by instinct against hotly debated doctrines of original sin and the ontology of hell. Among the first New Englanders to laud Dante's poem on religious terms

was Ralph Waldo Emerson's aunt Mary Moody Emerson (1774–1863), simultaneously an exercised adherent to Calvinism and a voracious consumer of literary texts. Described by her famous nephew as “the best example I have known of the power of the Puritans in full energy,” Moody Emerson typically exhorted her friends to “Make religion the great business of your life” and to contemplate “*Death, Judgment, and Eternity*” (quoted in Simmons xxxv). For her, evidently, Dante's Catholicism posed no obstacle to their shared belief in the primal drama of the soul's choice. Around 1814 Moody Emerson wrote to her friend Sarah Alden Bradford, “Ever you read Dante? Why is [*sic*] that his infernal regions are so much more interesting than his celestial? Is not man formed for terror, grandeur? Why then divest Christianity of it?” The validation of the horror and glory of the Christian religion is implicitly topical, a reference to the bleaching of those extremes by a nascent Unitarianism; in the same letter, one notices, Moody Emerson urges, “But oh do write a portrait of *Edwards on will*” (Simmons 86), the phrase by which *The Freedom of the Will* was commonly known. In 1830 she admonished Emerson's brother William that “Religion made too easy is not exciting for an immortal,” but that “in the sacred book / Whose leaves or white or dusky never change” (*Par.* 15:48–49, Cary translation) “are promises w'h give courage to do everything.”

That line from Dante makes me think how often I want to ask some one why he is not more read? Do read him. If old David Hume's opinions are not yet obsolete and shamed I would mention one w'h occurs while reading Dante—that all mythology may be realised some time or other. Pardonne glorious Poet me for this comparison—thou inspirest faith & the present morality! Thy wanderings are plumed by the mystic spirit of devine [*sic*] love and many such as we antisipate [*sic*]. (Simmons 293)

The intensity of Moody Emerson's religious fervor suggests why Ralph Waldo Emerson, in an appreciative eulogy of 1869, found that reading Dante recalled her “eloquent theology” (quoted in Cole 4), and it adumbrates Dante's enfolding into the literature of what has been termed “post-Calvinism”—a phenomenon in a generation, in the words of David S. Reynolds, “close enough to the Puritan past to sense the dramatic dualisms and the otherworldly emphasis of Calvinism” and to beam its doctrines “onto the perceived reality around them” (89).

**“Night’s and Hell’s Poet”: Melville**

The work of Herman Melville (1819–1891) is often interpreted in light of a Calvinism presumably acquired through the Dutch Reformed Church of his maternal ancestors, the Gansevoorts of Albany; on Melville’s father’s side, however, the family leaned toward Unitarianism, also the religious matrix of Melville’s New England wife, Elizabeth Shaw. The author’s highly creative sojourn among the Berkshires and his close friendship with Hawthorne render him, in the apt phrase of Lawrence Buell, a New Englander “by contagion” (4), and his knowledge of New England theology, including texts by Edwards (*Freedom of the Will* is cited in the 1853 story “Bartleby the Scrivener”), Andrews Norton, and Edward Beecher, is on record (see Duban, also Buell 180–81).<sup>2</sup> The marks of Calvinism in Melville’s fiction frequently assume the shape of an aggressive, even daimonic assault on a religious liberalism Melville evidently perceived as criminally shallow. T. Walter Herbert, in his foundational *Moby-Dick and Calvinism* (1977), asserts that “Melville’s religious perplexities were shaped by the fact that he absorbed in childhood the opposing theories of Unitarianism and the most conservative orthodoxy” (3–4); the sanguine tenets of Unitarianism paled, one senses, before the author’s growing attraction, expressed in his famous affirmation of Hawthorne, to “that Calvinistic sense of Innate Depravity and Original Sin, from whose visitations, in some shape or another, no deeply thinking mind is always and wholly free” (“Hawthorne and His Mosses” 243). Thomas Werge has pointed out, with regard to *Moby-Dick* (1851), Melville’s epistemological distance from Enlightenment rationality and “the Unitarian conviction that God may be defined as an infinite elevation of human reason,” concluding that “Melville—often reluctantly—acknowledges and sympathizes with Calvinist ideas and emphases. For the concerns of *Moby-Dick* must be linked not only to Melville’s preoccupation with the problem of knowledge but to his recognition of the source of that problem in the Fall of man” (486, 502). A similarly Calvinistic assessment of human nature and the fathomless mystery of the moral universe lurches dizzyingly in *Pierre, or, The Ambiguities* (1852), the novel that earned Melville the headline “HERMAN MELVILLE CRAZY.” In their Historical Note to the Northwestern-Newberry edition, Leon Howard and Hershel Parker pose Melville’s protagonist as an immature Captain Ahab, straining “to see the Truth behind the mask of the actual—and Melville was still preoccupied

with the problem of deciding whether a true vision would be of good or of evil" (373). *Pierre* is also the novel where Melville's references to Dante predominate.

Melville read Dante in the Cary translation in the 1840s; one of his copies, issued by Bohn's Antiquarian Library, survives, heavily underlined.<sup>3</sup> As with the novel's subterranean Calvinism, the Dante allusions in *Pierre* have undergone scrutiny for decades (see, for example, Mathews, Giovannini, Schless, Wright, Gollin); my contribution to this conversation is simply the proposition that these textual strands intertwine, that the Dante invoked in *Pierre* assumes the Calvinist mantle and operates like a hired combatant in the contemporary fray of religious ideas Melville took so urgently to heart. From the security of his comfortable home and the affection of his mother and angelic betrothed, Pierre is sucked abruptly into a downward spiral of existential despair accompanied by an accelerating involvement with Dante—"Night's and Hell's poet he," as Pierre pronounces, adding bitterly, "Damned be the hour I read in Dante! More damned than that wherein Paolo and Francesca read in fatal Lancelot" (42). This "burst of impatience against the sublime Italian," the narrative voice expatiates a few pages later, arose from "the poet being the one who, in a former time, had first opened to his shuddering eyes the infinite cliffs and gulfs of human mystery and misery"—arose moreover from "that half contemptuous dislike, and sometimes selfish loathing, with which, either naturally feeble or undeveloped minds, regard those dark ravings of the loftier poets, which are in eternal opposition to their own fine-spun, shallow dreams of rapturous or prudential Youth" (54). Presumably Dante provides an archaic authorization for Pierre's now savage nihilism: "The man Dante Alighieri received unforgivable affronts and insults from the world; the poet Dante Alighieri bequeathed his immortal curse to it, in the sublime malediction of the *Inferno*"—conspicuously the only canticle Pierre reads.

The fiery tongue whose political forkings lost [Dante] the solacements of this world, found its malicious counterpart in that muse of fire, which would forever bar the vast bulk of mankind from all solacement in the worlds to come. Fortunately for the felicity of the Dilletante [*sic*] in Literature, the horrible allegorical meanings of the *Inferno*, lie not on the surface; but unfortunately for the earnest and youthful piercers into truth and reality, those horrible meanings, when first discovered, infuse their poison into a spot previously unprovided with that sovereign antidote of a sense of uncapitlable security, which is only the possession of the furthest advanced and profoundest souls. (168–69)

"Dante," indeed, "had made him fierce" (170), and Pierre gloatingly inscribes his newly subversive vision into a novel appropriately characterized as his own *Inferno* (317–18). While it is of course naive to identify character with author, Pierre's dark conception of Dante closely corresponds with Melville's annotation (dated 1860) found opposite the *de rigueur* frontispiece portrait in the Bohn edition: "What execration! What hatred against the human race! What exultation and merriment at eternal sufferings!—In this view, the 'Inferno' is the most immoral and impious book every written." As Melville acknowledges further, the line is in turn a quotation: "Thus savagely writes [Walter] Savage Landor of the still more savage Tuscan" (quoted in Sealts 107). This is the Romantic construction of Dante identified by Steve Ellis (36–65) as "Byronic," amplified by the stanza from Thomas Parsons's "On a Bust of Dante" (1841) that Melville pasted under the frontispiece:

See from this counterfeit of him  
Whom Arno shall remember long,  
How stern of lineament, how grim,  
The father was of Tuscan song.  
There but the burning sense of wrong,  
Perpetual care and scorn abide,  
Small friendship for the lordly throng,  
Distrust of all the world beside.

But it is also the nay-saying of a "practically Calvinistic view of humanity" cited in *Pierre*, that holds "every man at bottom a fit subject for the coarsest ribaldry or jest" (232). In the same review where Melville commends Hawthorne's "Calvinistic sense of Innate Depravity and Original Sin," he praises the author as "deep as Dante" (251).

### **"That mediaeval nightmare": Holmes and Stowe**

In *Pierre*, Melville places Dante honorifically as co-authenticator of an inner hell worthy of "Sinners in the Hands." For his New England contemporaries Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809–1894) and Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811–1896), however, Dante was irreparably tainted by the legacy of Edwards and "the specter of Calvinism against whose shadow they labored" (Weber, "Figure" 563). Holmes lampooned New England Calvinism in his poem "The Deacon's Masterpiece, or, The Wonderful One-Hoss Shay" (1858), in the novel *Elsie Venner* (1861), and elsewhere in his



works; his novel *The Guardian Angel*, serialized in the *Atlantic* in 1867, slyly presents a descendant of the Rev. Joseph Bellamy as a lubricious seducer. As Weber suggests ("Recovery" 59–61), Holmes's animus against Edwards may have masked his resistance to his own father, the Rev. Abiel Holmes; Holmes's early biographer John T. Morse clearly sympathized with his subject's emancipated perspective, characterizing Abiel Holmes as "a clergyman who taught the old-fashioned Calvinism, with all its horrors" and blasting New England Calvinists because "In time they took Christ out of the Bible and put Jonathan Edwards in; they made a hell of immeasurable spaciousness and indescribable terrors, and overcrowded it" (Morse 1:15, 1:117).

Holmes's 1880 essay on Edwards accordingly assumes Dante and Edwards as tarred with the same infernal brush. "A chief ground of complaint against Edwards," Holmes writes, "is his use of language with reference to the future of mankind which shocks the sensibilities of a later generation. There is no need of going into all the plans and machinery of his 'Inferno,' as displayed in his sermons. We can endure much in the mediaeval verse of Dante which we cannot listen to in the comparatively raw and recent prose of Edwards." Holmes cites Edwards's "Dante-like descriptions of his 'Inferno'" and concludes that "wherever such pictures are found, at first or second hand, they are sure causes of unbelief, and liable to produce hatred not only of those who teach them, but of their whole system of doctrines" (*Writings* 8:384, 386).

As a Boston Brahmin (an appellation he himself invented) and a man of medicine, Holmes could dismiss Calvinism from a position of condescension. Stowe's engagement with Calvinism was far more immediate and much better informed: Ann Douglas compliments her on "conduct[ing] the most brilliant exploration of New England Calvinism as a theology and a lifestyle ever conceived by an American" (245). When Stowe's father, the Calvinist minister and revivalist Dr. Lyman Beecher (1775–1863), accepted a pulpit in Boston in 1826, she remembered, "Calvinism or orthodoxy was the despised and persecuted form of the faith. It was the dethroned royal family, wandering like a permitted mendicant in the city where once it had held high court, and Unitarianism reigned in its stead" (quoted in Fields 57). Impervious to this decreased social status, or perhaps exhilarated by it, Lyman Beecher proclaimed Calvinism with sublime conviction; spirited theological debate defined Stowe's childhood. Like Mary Moody Emerson, Stowe herself thrilled to the high

seriousness of Calvinism, asserting in the shadow of Mont Blanc that “Calvinism . . . will never cease from the earth, because the great fundamental facts of nature are Calvinistic, and men with strong minds and wills always discover it” (quoted in Charles H. Foster 68). But Calvinist beliefs regarding predestination and the fate of the reprobate assumed an immediate personal terror when the drowning of her sister’s unconverted fiancé appeared to decree his damnation—an “awful burden,” as Stowe wrote many years later, “which our dear father [here, God] never meant us to carry—the awful burden of thinking that every person who does not believe certain things and is not regenerated in a certain way *in this life* is lost forever” (quoted in Hedrick 284). Stowe carried on an arduous struggle with Calvinism for much of her life, moving eventually into the Episcopal communion. Yet she retained an abiding respect for the faith of her fathers and was able to communicate, as Noll writes, “two messages simultaneously—her abandonment, not just of certain Calvinist particulars, but of the whole way of thought that defined mainstream Calvinist debate from the 1790s onward, but also her loving admiration for the theology and theologians she was leaving behind” (325).

Stowe’s attitude toward Calvinism is therefore provocatively multifaceted, dictating similarly her reactions both to Jonathan Edwards and to Dante. In her novel *The Minister’s Wooing* (1859), she judges Edwards’s sermons “so terrific in their refined poetry of torture, that very few persons of quick sensibility could read them through without agony, and it is related, that, when, in those calm and tender tones which never rose to passionate enunciation, he read these discourses, the house was often filled with shrieks and wailings, and that a brother minister once laid hold of his skirts, exclaiming, in an involuntary agony, “Oh! Mr. Edwards! Mr. Edwards! is not God a God of mercy?” (*Writings* 5:245–46). Though “Sinners in the Hands” is not named in this passage, there can be no mistaking Stowe’s allusion, since the circumstances derive from Trumbull’s account in *The History of Connecticut*. Other documents identify the reading of Edwards’s sermon as personal memory. Stowe’s son Charles, in an informal memoir written long after her death, recalled seeing in Pisa frescoes of “the most horrible pictures of the torments of the damned in hell that the most morbid and depraved human imagination could conceive, and the skill of the human hand depict,” and reflected that Lyman Beecher had harbored his own Campo Santo:

It consisted in a vivid, lurid, and active belief in the hell of Jonathan Edwards' celebrated sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." I have from my mother's lips the following incident illustrative of this truth.

My mother was a child of five or six years of age when her mother died, and her father married again. Shortly after he brought his bride home he was reading to her as a fitting devotional exercise one Sunday afternoon Edwards's sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." My mother noticed a red flush growing even deeper on the cheek of the new wife till she sprang up in a state of terrible excitement and cried out, "I will not listen to another word. It is an outrageous slander on the very character of God," and bursting into a flood of tears rushed from the room. My mother said that her father sat as if paralyzed with amazement and unable to comprehend how any right-minded Christian could thus be affected by Edwards' terrible pictures of hell torments. ("Random Reflections" 41)<sup>4</sup>

To Stowe's son, "Sinners in the Hands" obviously reeks of a safely superseded Calvinism for whom medieval iconography offered the closest counterpart; to the urbane taste of her brother, the celebrated preacher Henry Ward Beecher, "a person of moral sensibility alone at midnight, reading that awful discourse, would wellnigh go crazy" (quoted in Rugoff 258). "Sinners in the Hands" no doubt mediated Stowe's Hartford neighbor Mark Twain's reading in *The Freedom of the Will* in 1902, prompting Twain's often-quoted description of the work as "a three days' tear with a lunatic," "the glare of a resplendent intellect gone mad," wherein "what I take to be Calvinism and its God begins to shine red and hideous in the glow from the fires of hell" (Paine 2:719–20). Though her husband, the Rev. Calvin (*nomen est omen*) Stowe, was reported to carry in his pocket a copy of the *Commedia*, along with a Greek New Testament, to the day of his death (Fields 93), Stowe was evidently incapable of wresting Dante from the death grip of Edwards. "I am glad to hear of your reading," she wrote on one occasion to Charles. "The effect produced on you by Jonathan Edwards is very similar to that produced on me when I took the same mental bath. His was a mind whose grasp and intensity you cannot help feeling. He was a poet in the intensity of his conceptions, and some of his sermons are more terrible than Dante's 'Inferno'" (Charles Stowe, *Life and Letters* 406). Her novel *Agnes of Sorrento* (1862)—composed after her trip to Italy in 1859 and conceived, she said, as "a spontaneous tribute to the exceeding loveliness and beauty of all things there" (quoted in Fields 39)—contains the largest concentration of Stowe's Dante references.

Though far less powerfully than in the earlier *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1851), *Agnes* continues Stowe's faith in the power of fiction to edify and even

effect the religious conversion of her readers, and the author absorbs the medieval poet into a narrative of religious progress. As Savonarola, cast as Agnes's uncle, prefigures Luther—though “differing from the great Northern Reformer as the more ethereally strong and nervous Italian differs from the bluff and burly German” (84)—Dante too is a forerunner of the triumph of Protestantism: “Did you never hear in Dante of the Popes that are burning in hell? Wasn't Dante a Christian, I beg to know?” (80). Indeed, the austerity Stowe attributes to Dante's generation illumines her sustained admiration for the Puritan fathers. “The men of Florence in its best days,” she avers, “were men of a large, grave, earnest mold. What the Puritans of New England wrought out with severest earnestness in their reasonings and their lives these early Puritans of Italy embodied in poetry, sculpture, and painting,” with the art of Giotto and Cimabue producing “angels and celestial beings . . . as different from the fat little pink Cupids or lovely laughing children of Titian and Correggio as are the sermons of President Edwards from the love-songs of Tom Moore” (257–58). Stowe's heroine, similarly, transcends the errors of her culture, achieving a spiritual beatitude “as truly as if she had been the veriest Puritan maiden that ever worshipped in a New-England meeting-house” (315).

Yet Stowe's fictional divagations on the medieval Church disclose again and again her revulsion from Calvinism's darker aspects. Like Edwards, or for that matter Lyman Beecher, the character of Father Francesco preaches habitually on themes of

fear and wrath,—the awful majesty of God, the terrible punishment of sinners, which he conceived with all that haggard, dreadful sincerity of vigor . . . of which the “Inferno” of Dante was the exponent and the out-come. His preachings and his exhortations had dwelt on that lurid world seen by the severe Florentine, at whose threshold hope forever departs, and around whose eternal circles of living torture the shivering spirit wanders dismayed and blasted with terror. (36)

And as with the New England religion of Stowe's experience, medieval Catholicism, she mourns,

brought also the news of the eternal, hopeless, living torture of the great majority of mankind, past and present. Tender spirits, like those of Dante, carried this awful mystery as a secret and unexplained anguish; saints wrestled with God and wept over it; but still the awful fact remained, spite of Church and sacrament, that the gospel was in effect, to the majority of the human race, not the glad

tidings of salvation, but the sentence of unmitigable doom. . . . The poet and the artist give only the highest form of the ideas of their day, and he who cannot read the "Inferno" with firm nerves may ask what the same representations were likely to have been in the grasp of coarse and common minds. (81–82)

For Stowe, apparently, reading Dante—though her knowledge of the text never moves beyond the superficial—could only rekindle her aversion to a Calvinist God "that creates myriads only to glorify himself in their eternal torments" (*Writings* 3:209–10); she recoiled, similarly, from Ary Scheffer's widely admired painting of Paolo and Francesca, calling it "a libel on my Father in heaven. No. *It is not* God who eternally pursues undying, patient love with storms of vindictive wrath" (quoted in Wagenknecht 110).<sup>5</sup> In a letter of 1867, Holmes replied to Stowe's commentary on one of his literary pieces as follows:

I bow meekly to all your criticisms except the Dante paragraph. . . . How often have I said, talking with Lowell, almost the same things you say about the hideousness, the savagery, of that mediaeval nightmare? Theodore of Abyssinia [the emperor despised for murdering British women and children in 1862] ought to sleep with it under his pillow, as Alexander slept with the Iliad. You cannot use too strong language. What could be expected of a Christianity that has filtered through such a mass of cruel and wicked human conceptions, but the barbarisms which hanged our grandmothers in 1692, and which to-day—? (Morse 2:225)<sup>6</sup>

### **"The husks of a false creed": Charles Eliot Norton**

Despite their distaste, both Stowe and Holmes intersected the energetic promotion of Dante in the literary culture centered at Harvard and propagated in the *Atlantic Monthly* under the editorship of James T. Fields, later Stowe's own editor (Fields and his wife Annie met Stowe during her trip to Italy in 1859); and Holmes, of course, along with his friend James Russell Lowell, was a regular participant in the "Dante Club" formed around Longfellow. Longfellow, by all accounts, rested serenely above the religious conflicts active among his contemporaries; his spirituality never dipped to the sectarian. But for Charles Eliot Norton (1827–1908), who would produce his own translation in 1891–92 and was destined to become the dean of American Dante studies, the *Commedia* provided an instrument indispensable both to his inner life and his negotiation of religious change.

As a loyal son whose first recorded ambition was “to edit Father’s works” (*Letters* 1:82), Charles Norton was bred to the Unitarian rationalist tradition; the medievalism for which he was later known, even caricatured (at Norton’s death wags imagined him entering heaven, shading his eyes, and groaning in disappointment, “Oh! So overdone! So garish! So Renaissance!” [Brown 147]), betrayed no ghost of attraction to the period’s religious expression. In a topical reference, he categorized Mary Baker Eddy’s Christian Science with distaste as “medievalism” (*Letters* 2:310), and already in his first book-length work, *Notes of Travel and Study in Italy* (1860), he condemned “the vulgar notion of hell” westering from medieval art to “the groaning of a set of miserable sinners on the anxious seats” in latter times (126). As William Roscoe Thayer concluded in an obituary published in the *Nation*, Norton—though “[b]rought up in the simple piety of Unitarianism, instructed from childhood to cherish the reasonableness of religion, endowed with strong religious sentiment”—in time “grew naturally into agnosticism, and his passage from the old to the new, being accomplished without wrench, left neither scars, nor bitterness, nor regret” (“Charles Eliot Norton” 406). In 1902 Norton told Goldwin Smith,

For us at least, faith in human fancies about invisible things has long since passed away, and for my own part, I have no sentimental regret at its vanishing. Without it, I find myself more in harmony with that exceedingly minute section of the universe to which I belong, not, indeed, in closer intellectual agreement with most of the good men and women my contemporaries, of whom all but an insignificant fraction are still living under the Ptolemaic dispensation, undisturbed in their practical conviction that this earth is the center of the universe, and man the chief object of creation. (*Letters* 2:326)

For Norton too, though less vividly than for Holmes or Stowe, his ancestral Puritanism (he was descended from the seventeenth-century minister John Norton and related to the poet Anne Bradstreet) conveyed only the odious doctrines of the “fallen nature of man through sin, the enmity of God toward the human beings he had created, the responsibility of man and his helplessness to free himself from the curse denounced upon him, the damnation of infants, [and] the eternal duration of the torments of hell to which the vast majority of mankind were doomed” (*Letters* 1:8)—a summation less faithful to the emphasis of seventeenth-century documents than to the cruder Calvinism of the nineteenth century. “I hate that word sin,” Norton declared in 1874 (*Letters* 2:40); during a European tour in 1869 he recoiled from Geneva, writing, “I hate

Calvinism and its works. What an ugly place—morally and materially—Geneva is, and what a beautiful place it ought to be!” (*Letters* 1:367).<sup>7</sup>

It is difficult therefore to see Norton's Dante study as a palliative, successful or failed, to his supposed religious anxieties (a view suggested in *Lears* 155–56). Yet it is also clear that Norton keenly appreciated the successive religious conflicts of his era and, living most of his life in Cambridge, operated in the eye of the storm. The testimony of his printed statements, relatively few though they are, implies a profoundly personal construction of Dante as spiritual sire for Norton's increasingly self-conscious prophetic stance. A position paper is the essay “Religious Liberty,” appearing in the *North American Review* in 1867: the “general dissatisfaction with traditional theology [and] skeptical tone of science in regard to the dogmas of the church,” Norton insists, “are really signs of religious life,—signs that the fundamental doctrine of all true religion, that of the responsibility of the individual to himself alone for his opinions, of the utter freedom of individual opinion, is gaining possession of the minds of men” (586); Norton presses further (596) for liberation from the creedal authority of “Rome, Geneva, Westminster” (site of the Assembly of 1647 that codified Calvinism in catechetical form). The following year, in “The Church and Religion,” Norton challenged the Oxford movement—“the revival of the sacerdotal spirit,” as he calls it—as a sign of ecclesiastical nervousness, “a sense of common danger to their supremacy in the regulation of religion,” and its emergence a troublesome but ultimately ineffectual obstacle to “the true Church of universal humanity” already existing, Norton proclaims, “wherever men . . . arrive at the true idea of religion as devotion—utter, absolute devotion—to what they know and feel to be best” (378, 396).

To envisage Dante as herald of this new dispensation required a resolute reconfiguration of the *Commedia*'s ostensive import, but Norton saw his purpose clear, asserting again and again the poet's freedom from the crippling vise of dogma. Woven throughout Norton's various periodical pieces, the theme erupts most trenchantly in “Dante, and His Latest English Translators” (1866), an essay preparing the ground for the Longfellow version. “At a time when faith in some kind of invisible realities—in something beyond this world and other than this world . . . was powerful as at no other time,” Norton insists, Dante's faith “was deeper, more imaginative, and more controlling than that of other men” (509–10); he “reverently received the husks of a false creed, and changed them by the

miracle of faith into the pure wheat of truth. . . . The poet rises above the creeds of his time, and his work gives form and expression to the immutable truths of the ideal world" (513). "The poet rose above his creed," Norton repeated in notes among his literary remains, "the man above his doctrine; truth, faith, and love are the immortal lessons that he enforces and elevates, and even while trammelled by the false dogmas and by the superstitions inculcated by a church that condemned to eternal torture all outside her own narrowing limits. . . . Through his poem Dante has been the companion of good men in their hours of trial; he has associated himself with their striving after virtue; he has identified himself with the progress of the world" ("Dante" 17–18).

Widely disseminated through his Dante classes at Harvard—classes reportedly so inspiring that "undisciplined youths who customarily spent lecture periods carving initials on classroom furniture slipped away at the end of the hour and bought all of Dante's works" (Brown 153)—Norton's message reached a more diverse audience in the "Six Lectures on Dante" he delivered at Johns Hopkins in 1894, then again at Harvard. Norton introduces the series by acknowledging the burgeoning contemporary interest in Dante—an interest, we may add, largely engineered and facilitated by Norton's immediate social circle—and credits it to, along with the day's oppressive materialism, "the general dissolution of the old forms of religious faith"; this sparks the question of what thinkers like Dante, "holding a definite creed founded upon ancient tradition, had to offer in respect to the origin and destiny of man, and what solution he had to give to the doubts which even the most authoritative of creeds failed to satisfy, and to the perplexities which it could not wholly clear away" (2). Dante, Norton instructs his hearers once again, exemplarily "transformed the dry bones of a theological system into a living body of truth" (8). By the third lecture, Norton could express his position in even plainer terms:

The *Divine Comedy* represents a special stage in the evolution of thought, the understanding of which is essential for understanding of the later course of civilization. It is the record of the intellectual conceptions and moral ideals of man during the period when the Church was regarded the depository of truth. . . . And yet for us who stand outside the Church of Dante, and to whom his theology seems as far from truth as his cosmology, the *Divine Comedy* possesses an interest exceptional not merely as a work of highest literary art . . . but mainly as the endeavor of a great poet to explain the mystery of existence, and as the



expression of the moral convictions of one of the most thoughtful and highminded men in regard to the conduct of life. His conclusions like those of all the best men of all times are simple and of universal application. (22–23)

What then, one might wonder, is to be made of Dante's implacable attention to hell? For Norton, one surmises, the supreme attraction of the *Inferno* radiated from what he evidently perceived as its enlightened, definitive displacement of punishment as visited upon sinners from above. Instead, as Norton makes clear in his fourth lecture, the *contrapassi* of the damned are best interpreted in moral, even organic terms: "of part with the sin, indissoluble from it, not its consequences but of its very nature"—"the inevitable condition of the sinner's soul" (18–19; see also note 7, below). This was a morality ultimately divorceable from theism, and one the upright Norton could willingly affirm.

### **"Our Puritan Dante": Charles Allen Dinsmore**

Norton had carried Dante beyond even Unitarianism, into a humanistic spirituality unconstrained by dogma. Among those who attended Norton's lectures, however, was Charles A. Dinsmore (1860–1941), a clergyman from Waterbury, Massachusetts, who had already published some Dante essays of his own in the *Atlantic*. Dinsmore's subsequent book *The Teaching of Dante* (1901), compiled from his *Atlantic* articles, proposes that the poet's message of salvation, freed from the contingencies of his age, "differs from what we hear in Protestant pulpits more in point of view and in definition than in reality." As a vestigially Calvinist theologian, Dinsmore affirms those passages of the *Inferno* aimed to frighten Dante's readers, since "A fearful vision, even of Hell and the awful consequences of sin, is needed to keep back their feet from evil." This "fearful vision" conjures up once again the primordial New England father: "Among modern seers Jonathan Edwards is most nearly related to our poet in subtilty [*sic*] of intellect, intensity of conviction, and in terrific power of imagination" (67). But aware of his status within a discredited, *passé* Calvinism and eager to respect Norton—who, he notes with pardonable pride, had commended the *Atlantic* pieces and "expressed a wish that the studies be gathered in a book" (x; Norton obligingly supplied a title and even read proofs)—Dinsmore attempts to engage the liberal and

conservative religious camps alike by dubbing Edwards “our Puritan Dante” but also casting the poet as “distinctively modern in his theme”:

He would be considered rash indeed who claimed this grim prophet as in any way an exponent of the newer religious thinking, which has broken with the stern and mechanical dogmas of the old theology. Yet it is exceedingly interesting to note how nearly every truth prominently asserted in our times by the leaders of thought has found expression in Dante. He emphasizes as strongly as did Channing or Phillips Brooks [a leading Episcopal clergyman] the essential divineness of man. . . . Evil choices are not the result of total depravity; it is through lack of knowledge that evil appears the good. . . . He differs widely from those Puritan rationalists who constructed theology almost wholly out of the analytical faculty and distrusted spiritual vision; he anticipates Horace Bushnell [among the most liberal theologians of nineteenth-century New England] in the trustworthiness of the intuitions. . . . (41–42)

But even so tentative a comparison with Edwards raised a battle flag, and Thayer’s review in the *Atlantic* (reprinted as “Dante in America”), while properly courteous in tone, effectively put Dinsmore out of court by identifying him as an “orthodox minister” who approached the *Commedia* “as a Calvinist” and saw Dante as champion of *The Freedom of the Will*. The disputes of an earlier generation were still audible enough in New England culture to require their suppression once and for all, a mission for which Thayer stood ready:

At the outset, a casual reader might be misled, by Mr. Dinsmore’s many admiring references to Jonathan Edwards, into expecting criticism of only parochial range; and, indeed, it is a mistake to call Edwards “our Puritan Dante.” Edwards is now remembered chiefly for having mistaken a demon for God, and for describing the everlasting torments of hell with such terrific vividness that he has filled far more insane asylums on earth than seats of the blest in heaven. It is time that posterity, which has repudiated his abominable teachings, should let his name sink into oblivion. Herod has been execrated for causing the slaughter of a few hundred innocent babes; but Edwards devoted his talent to convincing the world that an omnipotent monster has gone on creating myriads of millions of human creatures, of whom hardly one in every thousand is “saved,” and he calls this monster who had not Herod’s excuse, “God,” that is, Good. Let us have done with Edwards, and cease to imagine that he is in any sense a Dante. (85)

If, as Norton and Harvard alumni like Thayer obviously hoped, the work of Dante was to take its place among the educated class and those aspiring

to join it, Jonathan Edwards would have to be ushered out like an embarrassingly uncouth grandfather. In his *Life of Dante Alighieri*, published after the First World War, Dinsmore again defended Dante's right to depict the punishment of the wicked: "Dante as a prophet of God would arouse a wretched and misguided world to a true conception of the nature of evil" (239). But Edwards has been dutifully erased from the sentiment, replaced by the blessing of a higher authority: "I once asked Professor Charles Eliot Norton what quality in the 'Divine Comedy,' other than its beauty, attracted him to Dante. 'His powerful position of moral penalties and rewards,' was the answer" (239).

### Reinstating Edwards

Absolved of the *gaucherie* of Calvinism, Dante could be assumed into a cultural heaven of sane and secular open-mindedness—a gentleman, even genteel, content-provider for parlor essayists like Hamilton Mabie who stressed the poet's commodious universality. In an amusing irony, late-century attempts to rehabilitate Jonathan Edwards thus looked straight to Dante as a sponsor. As in Britain, the turn of the nineteenth century in America saw a patriotic valorization of the nation's origins and, as David Glassberg has shown, a fashion for civic pageants: and in New England Edwards was among the few figures familiar enough for such a role. As Joseph Conforti demonstrates in his exhaustive survey of the Edwards reception, the preacher of "Sinners in the Hands" "became a Puritan cultural icon—his figure caught up in a widespread revival of interest in the colonial past which was a heavily reactionary response to the ethnic, urban, and industrial transformation of America that altered even relatively small communities like Northampton" (4).

Among the "filiopietistic reassessments" cited by Conforti is *Jonathan Edwards: A Retrospect* (1901), a collection of addresses commemorating the sesquicentennial of Edwards's ignominious dismissal from Northampton. The volume is remarkable, even disorienting, for the way Edwards is moved to new status through enthusiastic if often contrived comparison with Dante, who presides from a plane of perfect irreproachability. The editor, H. Norman Gardiner, admits in his introduction that Edwards was commonly "supposed to represent the final divorce of theology from life, and to be sufficiently refuted by a reference to Holmes' brilliant satire of

a One-Hoss Shay,” but notes the significance that “some of his most appreciative students and ardent admirers chose to represent him less as a theologian than as a prophet of the Christian faith, an interpreter of human life, a force in religious experience, and profess to see in him less affinity with Calvin than with Dante” (xiii–xiv).

Indeed, comparisons to Dante run unbridled through the volume. Alexander V. G. Allen, a professor at the Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge, sets the tone by indicating, first, the Beatrician role of Sarah Pierrepont, Edwards’s cherished wife, of whom Edwards first wrote rapturously when knowing her only at a distance. “The deepest affinity of Edwards,” Allen insists, “was not that with Calvin or with Augustine, but with the great Florentine poet” (8)—who, in another resemblance to Edwards, also suffered unjust exile. Egbert C. Smyth, professor at Andover Theological School, gushes that Edwards “is so great, so beautiful, so high! I can but think of Dante’s words, as, in the empyrean, he turns with his eyes to Beatrice. ‘If,’ he writes, ‘what has been said of her so far as here were all included in a single praise, it would be little to furnish out this turn’” (35). And George A. Gordon, pastor of the Old South Church in Boston, urges that as with Dante, one must free Edwards from the chaff of his era “in order that through the precious residuum of wisdom and of power he may continue to civilize and bless the world. . . . And as Dante lives, in spite of the masses of obsolete thought that are in him, by the strength and nobleness of his imaginative appeal, Edwards will live, notwithstanding his error and imperfection, by the majesty of his appeal” (72).<sup>8</sup>

By the first decade of the twentieth century, Dante and Edwards had traveled, as it were, to hell and back: and while well-intentioned efforts to restore Edwards to social grace proved more or less ineffectual, the work of Dante was successfully brought to birth for the academy. James Turner has shown how Norton initiated, in effect invented *ex nihilo*, the modern concept of “western civilization” and left a durable mark on the liberal arts: Norton’s “wraith still haunts the college classrooms where freshmen once argued over ‘great books’” (388). If “the stemma of Norton’s influence” in fact “amounts to an apostolic succession” leading down to the New Humanism of Irving Babbitt and thence to the New Criticism of Brooks and Warren, then Norton embodied, as Leslie J. Workman has written, “the transference of moral force in America from

theology to literature" (578); in 1932 T. S. Eliot, by then an Anglo-Catholic with his own investment in Dante, granted his distant relative only "the moral and spiritual qualities of a stoic kind, which are possible without the benefits of revealed religion" (quoted in Workman 578). Few academics would want it any other way: Puritan theocracy remains vivid enough in our cultural memory for ideological censorship as a matter of course to recall Salem. As Andrew Delbanco warns, however, "if the language of evil is finally eliminated" from American discourse, "we shall surely be left with a kind of dumbness" (11). In the perception of Melville and Stowe, and perhaps secretly for Holmes, the utterances of Edwards and Dante retained some sense of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* identified by Rudolf Otto's classic exploration of "the Holy"; Norton's criticism, while highly moral and deeply committed to individual and social betterment, essentially wiped the terror away.

Or perhaps simply drove it underground. As Father Ingebreetsen notes, the literature of horror may "give voice to what a culture chooses to silence" (xxxii), and in the rude vitality of popular culture Dante and Edwards are still brought forward in hope of stirring primal fear. The Edwards of Stephen King's *Carrie* (1974) remains an inherently menacing figure, uncomplicated by two centuries of academic revaluation: "The closet door leered open. Inside, below a hideous blue light that was always lit, was Derrault's conception of Jonathan Edwards' famous sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*" (54). Likewise, where Norton's meticulously prepared edition gathers dust on library shelves, Doré's illustrations haunt cybersites with titles like "HorrorWeb," matched with the unabashedly obsolete Cary translation if with any of Dante's text at all, and rendering the *Inferno* irredeemably Gothic in the popular imagination. In the democratized realms of paperback fiction and the Internet, the cultural work of literary scholarship wields little influence: and the figures of Dante and Edwards continue to stalk side by side, pointing relentless fingers at the spectacle of the damned.

*Hope College*  
*Holland, Michigan*

## NOTES

Melville's copy of Dante reposes in the personal collection of William S. Reese; references appear by his gracious permission. The quotation from Charles Edward Stowe's "Random Reflections" appears

by permission of the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center, Hartford, Connecticut. Charles Eliot Norton's "Six Lectures on Dante" and "Dante" and the letter from Andrews Norton to Thomas W. Parsons are quoted by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University. I wish to dedicate this essay to the memory of my husband, Leslie J. Workman, who first introduced me to Charles Eliot Norton, accompanied me on many trips to the Houghton Library, and blessed me, day after day, with the gifts of his learning and his unshakeable respect for scholarship.

1. In a surviving letter (June 1844), Andrews Norton wrote Parsons, "There can be nothing in Daymon's translation to deter you from prosecuting your own work. . . . Should you continue your own translation, I hope it will be with the resolution to give to it all the time and study necessary to make it as nearly perfect as may be in your power; to remove all blemishes, and to bring out the sense of Dante in modes of expression conformed to his own." The rest of the letter is largely concerned with matters of diction, but Norton concludes cordially, "I have thus shown to what sort of corrections I would call your attention, if you persevere, as I hope you will, with your undertaking. I cannot say more than that it seems to me that you have all the essential requisites for it. But you must take it up as a labor of love, determined that nothing shall be wanting on your part to do justice to your author, to yourself, and to the interests of literature." For passages from Parsons's correspondence with Andrews Norton, see Haraszti 28, 31.

2. Duban refers to "Andrews Norton's monumental study of the *Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels* (1837-44), which Perry Miller called the 'perfect summation of Unitarian scholarship' and which Melville seems to have read prior to writing *Pierre*" (160).

3. The annotation I quote here (already reproduced in Sealts) is in fact the longest in the book. For a study of the implications of Melville's annotations and underlinings for his earlier novel *Mardi*, see Newman.

4. The same incident is recounted in Charles Stowe and Lyman Beecher Stowe, *Harriet Beecher Stowe: The Story of Her Life* (24-25).

5. Stowe's vision of female saviors, a topic currently prominent in Stowe scholarship, led her to occasional references to Beatrice, but the most textually specific reference to Dante I have found occurs in *My Wife and I* (*Writings* 12:94): "Now you know that Dante says the souls in the otherworld were divided into three classes, those who were for God and those who were for the Devil, and those who were for neither but for themselves. It seems to me that there's a many of these latter at work in our press. . . ."

6. James Russell Lowell also told Stowe, after reading *The Minister's Wooing*, "I confess a strong sympathy with many parts of Calvinistic theology, and, for one thing, believe in hell with all my might, and in the goodness of God for all that" (quoted in Charles Edward Stowe, *Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe* 335-36).

7. The English "man of letters" Leslie Stephen (father of Virginia Woolf) wrote to Norton in November of 1873, "I had a walk the other day, with our old friends, Carlyle and Froude. Carlyle attacked me, not unkindly, for certain remarks about hell which I made in a recent article upon Jonathan Edwards. The old prophet loves hell and assured me on the authority of Dante that it was made of infinite love" (quoted in Norton, *Letters* 2:19). The article was "Jonathan Edwards," published the same year in *Fraser's Magazine* and later collected in Stephen's *Hours in a Library*. In his essay, Stephen reproduces the circumstances of "Sinners in the Hands" at some length, asking, "Was the man who could utter such blasphemous sentiments—for so they undoubtedly appear to us—a being of ordinary flesh and blood? One would rather have supposed his solids to be of bronze, and his fluids of vitriol, than have attributed to them the character which he describes." Edwards was to some extent exonerated, however, in that all Christian tradition "share[s] the opprobrium due to the assertion of this shameful doctrine" (542). James Russell Lowell wrote to Stephen in 1876 (*Letters* 2:385), "I was especially interested in Jonathan Edwards, with whom (except in his physical notions of hell) I have a great sympathy—a case of *reversion*, I suppose, to some Puritan ancestor. If he had only conceived of damnation as a spiritual state, the very horror of which consists (to our deeper apprehension) in its being delightful to who is in it, I could go along with him altogether."

8. Shea (195, note 35) writes that "comparisons of Edwards and Dante are plentiful" in writings on Edwards at the turn of the century.

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# Reading Dante

ALAN GLEAVE

That face-up paperback, scholarly, creased,  
Its weight sprung on half-opened pages, rests  
(Troubling the coffee-table glance with visions)  
All afternoon, while the angled sunlight  
Shifts through the room the bright pauses of day  
Towards gathering dark, and the ache of thought.

When towards midnight, the constellations  
Seem merely adrift in vacuous time,  
The book opens, like a turn on the stair  
Predicating choice. Backwards a shuffle  
Through flag-draped piazzas, sunlit, hell-shadowed,  
Where remonstrant rogues, aflame and screaming  
Gurgle and spit in the free weltering  
Of damned, imperishable flesh.

Forward

The thump and discipline of airless verse  
Sends us scuttling through the fiery hatch  
Of Sol, opening upon the gentled night  
Beyond. Here the clarified saints, light-washed,  
Live, perfectly still, the life of the work:  
Grace-bodied virtues . . . heaven of all-gazing . . .

At last the dawn, furnace of metaphors,  
Opens for the reader that first wordless light.  
The book falls shut.

But morning, once arrived,

Ungleams, turns normal, greys with precedents  
While day-guilts wake to prowl impassably . . .

We live on – while some enduring figment –  
The figure of this shadow-pacing poet –  
Defines our vagueness in a moral phrase,  
Lays bare our faith like our anatomy,  
And makes our death a book-cleft, where we go  
To sound the bleakest passages of love.

# American Dante Bibliography for 2004

STEVEN BOTTERILL

**T**his bibliography is intended to include all publications on Dante (books, articles, translations, reviews) appearing in North America in 2004, as well as reviews from foreign sources of books published in the United States and Canada. The listing of reviews is necessarily selective, especially in the case of studies bearing only peripherally upon Dante. Items not recorded in the bibliographies for previous years are entered as addenda to the current list; items from 2004 not identified in time for inclusion in the list will be added in future issues of the journal. I extend my thanks to research assistants Ryan Maddox, Robin De Leonardis, and Ryan Kerns, for their invaluable help.

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Since 1887 the Dante Society of America has offered an annual prize for the best student essay on a subject related to the life or works of Dante. The Dante Prize of two hundred and fifty dollars is offered for the best essay submitted by an undergraduate in any American or Canadian college or university, or by anyone not enrolled as a graduate student who has received the degree of A.B. or its equivalent within the past year. In addition, a prize of five hundred dollars, the Charles Hall Grandgent Award, is offered for the best essay submitted by an American or Canadian student enrolled in any graduate program.

All submissions must be sent as e-mail attachments to the Dante Society at [dsa@dantesociety.org](mailto:dsa@dantesociety.org). Undergraduate essays should be no longer than 5,000 words and graduate essays no longer than 7,000 words. The deadline for submission is June 30.

Each writer should provide a cover page (as the first page of the file) giving the writer's name, local, permanent and e-mail addresses, the title of the essay, the essay category, and the writer's institutional affiliation. The writer's name should not appear on the essay title page (to follow the cover page) or on any other page of the essay since the essays are submitted anonymously to the readers. Quotations from Dante's works should be cited in the original language, and the format of an essay should conform to either the Chicago or MLA Style Sheet guidelines.

Submissions will be judged by a special Committee of the Society. If it should be decided that none of the essays submitted deserves a full prize, the Society may award one prize to two contestants, each to receive one half of the prize, or it may make no award. The results will be announced in early autumn and published in the fall issue of the Society's *Newsletter* and in *Dante Studies*. While the essays remain the intellectual property of the writers, the submitted text will not be returned to authors.

## Report of the Secretary

The 123rd annual meeting of the Dante Society (and the 50th of the incorporated Dante Society of America) was held at the Carriage House of the Longfellow National Historic Site in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on Saturday, May 21, 2005. President **Giuseppe Mazzotta** called the meeting to order at 2:30 p.m. President Mazzotta introduced **Jim Shea**, the Manager of the Longfellow National Historic Site, and Mr. Shea offered a few words of welcome to our group.

After the business meeting, President Mazzotta presented the second Charles T. Davis Award for Distinction in Dante Studies to past President of the Dante Society, Professor **Robert Hollander** of Princeton University. Professor Hollander spoke briefly to thank the Society, and **Teodolinda Barolini** of Columbia University and **Kevin Brownlee** of the University of Pennsylvania each offered remarks highlighting the nature and scope of Robert Hollander's scholarship. President Mazzotta then introduced **Regina Psaki** of the University of Oregon at Eugene, who spoke on "Aestheticism and Its Discontents: Dante and the Contemptus Mundi Tradition" and illustrated her topic with audio recordings.

The balloting in the spring of 2005 resulted in the election of **Olivia Holmes** and **Dana Stewart** to the Council for a term of three years and re-election of **Todd Boli** as Secretary-Treasurer for a term of one year. In the summer, **Guy Raffa** was elected Vice-President for the year 2005–2006.

In the prize competition for 2005, the Dante Prize for the best undergraduate essay was awarded to **Michael Nicholson** of the University of California, Berkeley, and the Grandgent Award for the best essay by a graduate student was awarded to **Zane Mackin** of Columbia University. **Brenda Schildgen** (chair) and **Guy Raffa** served as Prize Committee judges.

The Dante Society met in conjunction with the MLA Convention in Washington, DC, on Friday, December 30, 2005. **Giuseppe Mazzotta** introduced **Ronald Martinez** of Brown University, who spoke on the topic "The Poets and the Paternoster: Lyric and Liturgical Disciplines in Dante's *Commedia*."

The Society, in conjunction with the Fédération Internationale des Instituts d'Études Médiévales, sponsored four sessions on Dante at the

Fortieth International Congress on Medieval Studies, held at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan, May 5–8, 2005:

Dante I: Perspectives on the *Divine Comedy*, **Mary Watt** (University of Florida), Chair. **Robert Di Pedè** (Seton Hall University): “The Sensual Pilgrim, Transfiguration, and the World: The Poetics of Society.” **Tonia Bernardi Triggiano** (Dominican University): “*Paradiso* XI–XII: Franciscan ‘belle e brutte figure.’” **Christopher Kleinhenz** (University of Wisconsin–Madison): “Visualizing Dante and the *Commedia*.”

Dante II: Problems in the *Divine Comedy*, Nicholas R. Havely (University of York), Chair. **Christine Baur** (Fordham University): “The Justice of Virgil’s Place in the *Commedia*.” **Glenn A. Steinberg** (The College of New Jersey): “Dante, Virgil, and Christianity: Biblical Allusion and Clueless Pagans in *Inferno* IV.” **Marsha Daigle-Williamson** (Spring Arbor University): “Not One, Not Two, But Three Dantes: Intentional Reflection of the Trinity?”

Dante III: The Fortunes of Dante in Italy and England, **Christopher Kleinhenz** (University of Wisconsin–Madison), Chair. **Caron Ann Cioffi** (Independent Scholar): “The Sepulcher of the Heart: The Influence of Dante on Petrarch’s Eleventh Eclogue.” **Nicholas R. Havely** (University of York): “‘Questo libro chonpri in Londra’: Selling the *Commedia* in 15th-Century England.” **Mary Watt** (University of Florida): “Michelangelo’s Moses: A Dantesque Portal to the Circle of Pride.”

The Intellectual Education of Dante (Co-sponsored by F.I.D.E.M.), **Christopher Kleinhenz** (University of Wisconsin–Madison), Chair. **Stefano Gulizia** (Indiana University): “Dante, Macrobius, and the Rhetoric of Reciprocation.” **Roy Hagman** (Trent University): “Dante and the Nobility of Latin.” **Julia Bolton Holloway** (University of Colorado, Boulder [Emerita]): “Digitizing Brunetto as Key to Dante.”

## Style Sheet

### Guidelines for Contributors

*Dante Studies* is the official annual of the Dante Society of America, which was founded in 1881 by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, James Russell Lowell, and Charles Eliot Norton (the Society's first three presidents) and others. Like the Dante Society as a whole, *Dante Studies* is dedicated to the furtherance of the study of the works of Dante Alighieri. Its editorial board welcomes submissions, in English or Italian, on all subjects connected with Dante's life, works, influence, and critical reception.

For distinctive treatment of words and phrases, grammar, punctuation, style, and matters of bibliographic citation, consult the *Chicago Manual of Style* (parenthetical numbers below refer to the 15th edition). The following notes highlight major style issues and clarify *DS* preferences where *CMS* offers choices or where *DS* practice deviates from *CMS*.

Authors are strongly encouraged to use inclusive language when possible.

### Abbreviations

Do not use abbreviations (except parenthetically) in run of text.

In notes, avoid *loc. cit.* and *op. cit.* Use *ibid.* only to refer the reader to a single bibliographic item cited in the immediately preceding note. If more than one work is cited in the previous note, an abbreviated (author-short title) citation should be used.

### Capitalization

Capitalize specific Dantean concepts (e.g., Second Circle, Hell, Purgatory).

Certain terms designating historical, political, or cultural movements or periods are traditionally capitalized (e.g., High Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Risorgimento); many such descriptive terms, however, need not be capitalized (e.g., antiquity, the quattrocento) (*CMS* 8.77–8.80). Capitalize adjectives derived from proper nouns that designate cultural movements and styles (e.g., Romanesque) (*CMS* 8.85); otherwise such terms may be set lowercase.

Capitalize religious and theological concepts (e.g., the Annunciation).

Generic terms designating sections of poems, plays, and the like should be capitalized only when used with figures to cite particular sections (e.g., Canto 23, Book 4 of the *Aeneid*). Note that this opposes the recommendation of CMS 8.194, which specifies that such terms be universally lowercase.

Capitalize permanent epithets and personal titles that function as part of the name or can be used in direct address. Titles occurring in apposition that function descriptively (and would not occur in direct address) should not be capitalized. Titles used alone or following a name should be lowercased in run of text (but capitalized in acknowledgments and the like). (CMS 8.21–38)

the bishop of Paris, William of Auvergne  
Doctor Angelicus  
Fra Remigio de' Girolami, lector of theology at Santa Maria Novella  
King George III, *but* the king of England  
the Master  
Pope Innocent III, the pope  
The prefect Acerbo Falseroni of Florence  
secretary-treasurer Richard Lansing (*but* Address correspondence to  
Richard Lansing, Secretary-Treasurer, The Dante Society of  
America)

For proper nouns, subtitles, and titles in French, see below and CMS 10.29–10.30. Capitalize all principal words in names of buildings (e.g., Opéra-Comique). In the names of associations, institutions, exhibitions, organizations, and the like, capitalize the first substantive only (e.g., la Légion d'honneur). Note that translated names follow English conventions for capitalization; for example, Exposition universelle internationale is rendered as Universal Exposition.

## **Citations**

### *Archives and Libraries*

Use full names for first instance of a given institution, though sigla may be abbreviated:

Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale (= Bibl. Naz.) (e.g., Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS Magl. [Magliabechiana] 165, fol. 1r)

London, British Library (e.g., London, British Library, MS Add. 19587)

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France (= Bib. nat.)

### *Edition-Independent Identifying Numbers*

Short citations to works by Dante are included parenthetically in running text (and may be used in notes as well): titles—spelled out in text—are abbreviated as below, with arabic identifying section numbers separated by periods. Italics, never underline, should be used for titles.

*Conv.* 4.24

*Epist.* 13.10.29

*Inf.* 31.112–14

*Mon.* 3.4.12

*Par.* 33.131, 137

*Purg.* 5.114

Works by other authors may be cited similarly after the complete title has been introduced. (For example, Vergil's *Aeneid*, referenced in the text, might be followed by a subsequent parenthetical *Aen.* 1.725.) A single reference to a classical or medieval text however, should not be abbreviated.

### *Scripture*

Parenthetical references to scripture should use the “traditional” abbreviations (e.g., Gen. 1:14–19) (*CMS* 17.247, 15.51–15.53).

### *Secondary Literature*

There is no need to include a works list in addition to endnotes; however, authors must indicate facts of publication as completely as possible, including, for example, edition of works cited, series information, and so forth. For place of publication, use English-language equivalents for foreign city names (e.g., Florence, Rome, Vatican, *not* Firenze, Roma, Vaticano). After an initial citation, abbreviate to author plus short title for subsequent mentions of the same work.

Use headline style capitalization for titles of English-language books and articles. Within titles, hyphenation of compounds should follow the “traditional” rules noted in *CMS* (8.170).

In general, citations of works in languages other than English may hew to *CMS*’s simple rule (10.3): “first word of title and subtitle and all proper nouns.” For German titles, see *CMS* 10.43. For French titles, see below. Note that Latin also capitalizes proper adjectives. Punctuation of foreign-language titles may be modified slightly to accord with American practice (e.g., change periods to colons before subtitles).

*Contra academicos*

*De civitate Dei*

*Storia della letteratura italiana*

*Studi danteschi*

French titles.

Periodicals (academic): first word plus all principal words, distinguishing, for example, Histoire/histoire, if necessary (e.g., *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge*).

Books, compositions, newspapers, plays, etc.: capitalize (1) the first word (in titles beginning with any word other than an article or adjective, *only* first word); (2) a substantive following an initial article as well as an intervening adjective; (3) proper nouns; (4) first word of subtitle, e.g., *Un Cérémonial politique: Les Voyages officiels des chefs d’État*.

Titles within titles. In article citations, titles may be italicize as usual (e.g., “*In Omnibus Viis Tuis*: Compline in the Valley of the Rulers”). Within italicized titles the embedded title should be enclosed in quotation marks:

John Kleiner, *Mismapping the Underworld: Daring and Error in Dante’s “Comedy,”* *Figurae: Reading Medieval Culture* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994), 153 n. 33. [Note in this example that no comma comes between the page number and the note number (*CMS* 17.140).]

Do not italicize an initial “the” in the names of periodicals (the *New York Times*).



In indicating pages, *p.* or *pp.* is omitted unless necessary for clarity. Inclusive page ranges should be compressed according to the scheme summarized below (under “Numbers”).

For Internet citations, do not enclose URLs in angle brackets.

In general, spell out series names in full; however, such well-known abbreviations as *PL* and *PMLA* need not be expanded.

Sample note forms:

#### EDITIONS

Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. Charles S. Singleton, 6 vols., Bollingen Series 80 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1970–75).

Gregory, *Moralia in Job* 4.1 (*PL* 75.637–41).

#### ARTICLE

Charles T. Davis, “Dante’s Vision of History,” *Dante Studies* 118 (2000): 243–59.

Paul Renucci, “Dante et les mythes du Millenium,” *Revue des Études Italiennes*, n.s., 11 (1965): 393–421.

#### BOOKS/ /MONOGRAPHS

Helga Scheible, *Die Gedichte in der “Consolatio Philosophiae” des Boethius*, Bibliothek der klassischen Altertumswissenschaften, n.F., 46 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1972).

Teodolina Barolini, *Dante’s Poets: Textuality and Truth in the Comedy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 212–15.

#### REFERENCE WORKS

*The Dante Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Forese.”

#### *Italics*

Foreign words and phrases not in general usage (*Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* may be considered a starting point in this regard) should be italicized (e.g., *canzoni*).

#### *Quotations*

Preferred editions of Dante’s works:

All cited references to the works of Dante should be based on the following editions: *La Commedia secondo l’antica vulgata*, edited by

- Giorgio Petrocchi, *Società Dantesca Italiana*, Edizione Nazionale, 4 vols., Milan, Mondadori, 1966–1968; 2nd edition, Florence: Casa editrice Le lettere, 1994; or *Dantis Alagherii Comedia*, edited by Federico Sanguineti, Tavarnuzze (Florence), SISMEL-Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2001.
- Vita Nuova*, edited by Domenico De Robertis, in *Opere Minori*, vol. 1/1, Milan-Naples, Ricciardi, 1984, pp. 3–247; or *Vita Nova*, ed. Guglielmo Gorni, Turin, Einaudi, 1996.
- Il Convivio*, edited by Maria Simonelli, Bologna, Pàtron, 1966; or *Convivio*, in *Opere minori*, vol. 1/2, edited by Cesare Vasoli and Domenico De Robertis. Milan and Naples: Ricciardi, 1988.
- De vulgari eloquentia*, edited by Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, in *Opere minori*, vol. 2, Milan-Naples, Ricciardi, 1979, pp. 3–237.
- Egloge*, edited by Enzo Cecchini, in *Opere minori*, vol. 2, Milan-Naples, Ricciardi, 1979, pp. 645–689.
- Epistole*, edited by Arsenio Frugoni and Giorgio Brugnoli, in *Opere minori*, vol. 2, Milan-Naples, Ricciardi, 1979, pp. 505–643.
- Il Detto d'Amore*, edited by Gianfranco Contini, in *Opere minori*, vol. 1/1, Milan-Naples, Ricciardi, 1984, pp. 799–827.
- Il Fiore*, edited by Gianfranco Contini, in *Opere minori*, vol. 1/1, Milan-Naples, Ricciardi, 1984, pp. 553–798.
- Monarchia*, edited by Bruno Nardi, in *Opere minori*, vol. 2, Milan-Naples, Ricciardi, 1979, pp. 239–503.
- Questio de aqua et terra*, edited by Francesco Mazzoni, in *Opere minori*, vol. 2, Milan-Naples, Ricciardi, 1979, pp. 691–880.
- Rime*, edited by Gianfranco Contini and Domenico De Robertis, in *Opere Minori*, vol. 1/1, Milan-Naples, Ricciardi, 1984, pp. 251–552; 2nd edition, edited by Domenico De Robertis, Florence: Casa editrice le lettere, 2002.

Use a word space on both sides of the solidus (e.g., “la quale è sì invilita, / che ogn’om par che mi dica: ‘Io t’abandonò’”).

The journal does not include translations of Dante’s Italian texts unless there is a special *ad locum* reason. Extracts from Latin texts, however, should be accompanied by parenthetical English translations.

### Numbers

In run of text, spell out one through ninety-nine and large round numbers. In sentences including numbers both greater and less than ninety-nine, use figures. Do not use roman numerals in citations.

Dates should be expressed in the form *month day, year*. Decades should be written out in full in figures or as words (the 1330s, *or* the thirties, *but not* the '30s).

Spell out designations for centuries and unit modifiers composed thereof:

the fourteenth century; fourteenth-century works  
the early/late fourteenth century; late fourteenth-century works  
the mid to late fourteenth century; mid to late fourteenth-century works  
the mid-1330s, the mid to late 1330s

Inclusive ranges should be compressed according to the scheme offered in CMS 9.64, which may be summarized as follows. Note, however, that for life dates both numbers should be given in full (e.g., 1313–1375, *not* 1313–75).

- The first number is 1–99 or 100, 200, and so on: the second number is given in full (e.g., 4–29, 100–102).
- The first number is 101–109, 201–209, and so on: only the changed element of the second number is given (e.g., 102–3)
- The first number is 110–199, 210–299, and so on: the second number uses two or more digits (e.g., 1234–37, 1290–1321)

### *Punctuation*

A single space should separate sentences. Indeed, two or more spaces should never appear together: e.g., use indent for a new paragraph.

Do not use a comma after a short introductory phrase, unless a pause is strongly implied or readability would be adversely affected otherwise:

Thus Dante invites the reader to scrutinize . . .

In 1239 he wrote . . .

In the second book of *Monarchia* Dante . . .

Indeed, he did quite the opposite. . . .

First of all, Dante's admirers . . .

Do use the series comma: *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*.

Do not separate a restrictive term from its neighbor with a comma, but do use a comma to set off nonrestrictive elements.

“In his treatise *Contra falsos ecclesie professores*, which was written about 1305 . . .” (no comma after title, but comma before nonrestrictive clause)

“In the second work written in the 1340s that was composed for his new patron . . .” (there were *two* works written for the new patron, both in the 1340s)

### *Spelling*

Use American spelling. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* may be considered an authority in matters of spelling and hyphenation: where alternative spellings for the same term are given, use the main entry (e.g., “fueled,” not “fuelled”; “toward” not “towards”). For personal names, consult *Webster's New Biographical Dictionary* or the Name Authority Headings of the Library of Congress (<http://authorities.loc.gov/>).

For possessives of singular nouns ending in *s*, including proper nouns, add an apostrophe and an *s*, observing the exceptions noted in *CMS* 7.20–7.22.

With regard to hyphenation, *DS* favors closing compounds that sometimes appear hyphenated (e.g., preexisting). If uncertain about whether or not to spell a term with or without a hyphen or closed up, check *Merriam-Webster's* first to verify the status of a given term, then apply the principles concerning hyphenation set forth in *CMS* 7.82–7.90. Temporary compounds that as a unit function adjectivally before a noun (unit modifiers) should be hyphenated (e.g., “she found herself engaged in a decision-making process,” but “decision making was not her favorite task.”)

